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## "Killing The Cattle, Hogs, and Fowls"/stories of Osceola

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“Killing the Cattle, Hogs, and Fowls”/Stories of Osceola

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Tallahassee, Florida

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A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty  
of the College of William & Mary in Candidacy for the Degree of  
Masters of Arts

Lyon G. Tyler Department of History

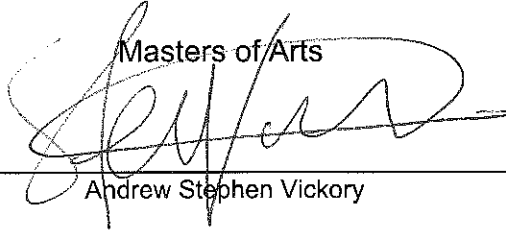
The College of William and Mary  
January 2017



## APPROVAL PAGE


This Thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

Masters of Arts

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Andrew Stephen Vickory

Approved by the Committee, October, 2016

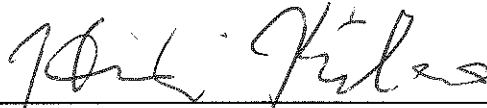
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## ABSTRACT

### “Killing the Cattle, Hogs, and Fowls”: Creek Indians and Domesticated Livestock, 1700-1814

During the Red Stick War of 1813-14, the Creek Indian faction known as the Red Sticks killed the majority of cattle and hogs in Creek Country. The rejection of these animals was a purposeful tactic that carried great significance for the Red Stick movement, and was closely tied to Creek discourses concerning identity, autonomy, and community organization. By the early nineteenth century, Creeks already had a century-long history of experience with livestock, and the historical trajectory of those experiences is crucial to understanding Creek actions during the Red Stick War. Feral cattle and hogs, as well as domesticated horses, were a significant presence in Creek Country by the 1720s, but it was not until more than fifty years later that some Creeks began to individually own large herds of livestock. This paper will explore the changing ways in which Creeks dealt with livestock in the century preceding the Red Stick War, and will explore the ecological, economic, and political implications of large-scale cattle and hog ownership that ultimately led Red Stick Creeks in the nineteenth century to reject the presence of these animals in their communities.

### Stories of Osceola: American Myth-Making from Removal to Abolition

This paper focuses on the stories circulated in the American press about the Seminole Indian Osceola in the mid-nineteenth century. Although Osceola did not occupy an especially prominent position within Seminole society at the time, his much-publicized capture during the Second Seminole War (1835-1842) and his subsequent death made him into a national celebrity in the mid-nineteenth century. Osceola's relative insignificance before this moment allowed his murky past to be deployed in the service of numerous ideological pursuits. Popular writings about Osceola in the United States flourished primarily in two periods: first in the years immediately following his death in the late 1830s and early 1840s during the Second Seminole War; and then again in the 1850s during the Third Seminole War. These writings were often highly imaginative elaborations on partial-truths or, at times, outright fabrications, but they also reflected the concerns and anxieties of Americans in the particular historical moments in which they were produced. In the national reaction to the Second Seminole War, the myths circulating about Osceola were shaped by debates over Indian removal and were heavily inflected with “noble savage” and “vanishing Indian” tropes. A decade later, stories about Osceola were resurrected during the Third Seminole War in the 1850s and refashioned to fit debates over the future of African slavery in the United States, mobilized in particular by northern abolitionists who used the story of Osceola as anti-slavery propaganda.

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This project would not have been possible without the continued support and encouragement of Joshua Piker, who has done more for me than I ever would have thought to expect from an advisor. I would also like to thank all of my fellow history students at the University of Oklahoma and the College of William & Mary. Deserving special recognition are Jimmy Del Rio and Joe Otto at OU, and Joe Fitzgibbon, Mark Guerci, Jack Masterson, Matt Niendorf, and Peter Olsen-Harbich at W&M. Along for the ride at both of these institutions is Nate Holly, who, along with his wife Brittany, have been a constant source of support and friendship for which I am truly grateful.

## Intellectual Biography

Coming into the graduate school, I was interested broadly in southeastern Native American history and more specifically in ethnohistory, environmental history, and economic history. While my broad interest in southeastern Indian history has remained constant, my more specific interests underwent several changes. As the two papers contained herein suggest, my focus moved forward chronologically—from the late eighteenth century to the first half of the nineteenth—and, thematically, from an ethnohistorical approach to Native history to a focus on representations of Indians by white Americans. This latter shift, however, had perhaps more to do with circumstance—the specific topic I found interesting and the courses I was taking—than with sweeping shifts in my intellectual commitments.

In my first paper, “‘Killing the Cattle, Hogs, and Fowls’: Creek Indians and Domesticated Livestock, 1700-1814,” written during an Atlantic history research seminar, I sought to understand how the introduction of livestock into the American South throughout the eighteenth century affected Creek Indian communities, as well as the ways that Creeks dealt with these animals and the conflicts that arose because of their presence. My interest in this topic was driven in large part from reading environmental histories like Virginia DeJohn Anderson’s *Creatures of Empire* and Elinor Melville’s *A Plague of Sheep*, among others, which tend to show the introduction of European livestock as inherently detrimental to Native communities. The focus of these studies with respect to Native Americans is that the presence of livestock facilitated the process of colonization and helped tip the balance of power between Europeans and Indians in favor of the former. My goal was not to replicate these studies for the case of the American South, nor was it necessarily to argue against these narratives. Rather, I wanted to



focus on how livestock affected intra-community relations among Creeks and less on Creek relations with outsiders. The latter part of this turned out to be impossible, though, as interactions between different Creek groups were difficult to untangle from those with outsiders, but I was nevertheless generally successful in maintaining a focus primarily on Creeks themselves.

Concerning the effects of livestock on relations between different Creek towns and regions, I wanted to show that their introduction was an important cause of conflict among Creeks. By beginning and ending the paper with the catastrophic Red Stick War, I was perhaps successful, at least superficially, in doing so. Unfortunately, though, what I ended up doing was, in essence, replacing the familiar narrative of Native declension with a narrative that assumed the inevitability of conflict among Native groups—or the inevitable decline of relative cohesion—as a result of livestock ownership. If I were to rework the paper for publication, I would like to make the Red Stick War seem less of an impending inevitability and would instead focus on the larger range of relationships that could be forged (rather than only broken) as a result of livestock ownership. After all, many Creeks had a very positive relationship with livestock before the Red Stick War, and, moreover, livestock formed the core of the Creek economy in the decades after the war and helped to solidify bonds between Creeks during subsequent western migration.

In the course of my research for this paper, I came across references, at the tail-end of my period of study, to the Seminole leader Osceola. I was reading Seminole sources because Seminoles and certain groups of Creeks had long been in semi-regular contact and, after the Red Stick War, many Creeks, including Osceola's mother, migrated to Florida and took refuge among the Seminoles. Osceola is a figure of considerable fame among not only among Native historians but also among the the general public. Though I thought I was fairly familiar with Osceola's story, the references I found to him struck me in a couple distinct ways. First, the

American media in the 1830s described him in highly romantic language different from how American observers described Creeks and Seminoles in decades prior. It was not uncommon in this period of American expansion to lament, in romantic language, the imagined coming extinction of Native Americans, but the second thing that struck me was the great disconnect between how Osceola was described in American newspapers and how he was described in sources written by officials who had experience dealing with Indians in the South. Osceola became, in the first half of the nineteenth century, a larger-than-life figure in the American imagination, while documents produced on the ground seemed to suggest he was not an especially prominent Seminole leader during his lifetime and, in the eyes of many Seminoles, at most a troublesome rabble-rouser not fit to speak on their behalf. Although I was curious about this disjuncture between representation and reality, I put such concerns aside until I had the opportunity to pursue it more fully in my second research seminar.

My second research seminar, focused on the early republic and taught by Dr. Christopher Grasso, gave me an opportunity to return to my questions about Osceola, as the topic fit chronologically and also jived with the Dr. Grasso's interest in early American intellectual history. The paper sought to understand why Osceola became a national celebrity in the mid-nineteenth century despite not having occupied an especially prominent position among Seminoles during his lifetime. I identify two periods during which the story of Osceola came into the national spotlight: first in the years immediately following his death in the late 1830s and early 1840s during the Second Seminole War; and then again in the 1850s during the Third Seminole War. Writings about him in the press were often highly imaginative elaborations on partial-truths or, at times, outright fabrications, but they also reflected the concerns and anxieties of Americans in the particular historical moments in which they were produced. In the first of

period, Indian removal was a major concern in the national dialogue, and in the second, debates over the future of slavery came to prominence. Although the facts of Osceola's life are murky in all but the barest details, Americans constructed stories about him in each period in the service of the pressing debates of the day.

Thinking through how and why Americans created the legend of Osceola in the nineteenth century was one of the most intellectually stimulating set of concerns I've undertaken in my academic career. Part of the reason for this is that I was walking onto historical terrain that I had been relatively unfamiliar with but that I found very interesting. Although the newness of nineteenth-century intellectual history was exciting, I was often frustrated with my limited ability to provide the kind of context I would have liked concerning the debates I discuss. Thus, in order to make this paper fit for publication, I would focus first on doing a much wider survey of the literature on mid-nineteenth-century political and intellectual history than I was able to do here. Doing so would, of course, sharpen how I analyze and frame the myths constructed about Osceola but would also allow me to address with more specificity the finer parts of the historiographical debates I engage. In particular, although I discuss how Osceola's story was utilized by Americans in debates over both Indian removal and abolition, the relationship between the two—where and why they were connected in the minds of nineteenth-century Americans—remains under-theorized not only in this paper but in the historiography more generally.

### “Killing the Cattle, Hogs, and Fowls”: Creek Indians and Domesticated Livestock, 1700-1814

In the summer of 1813, Creek Indians in present-day Georgia and Alabama were engulfed by what one observer described as a “rage of Frenzy.” Benjamin Hawkins, a United States’ agent for Indian Affairs living among the Creeks, described chaotic scenes in which “fanatical” warriors in various towns were killing prominent Creek leaders and were “destroying ... all the cattle, hogs and fowls.” In the Upper Creek town of Okfuskee, Hawkins heard, the “fanatical” Creeks had “killed five Chiefs and destroyed almost all the cattle in town.” In Kialijee, “several ... inhabitants [were] murdered and all their hogs, cattle and fowls killed.” And outside the town of Tookabatche, where frightened Creek leaders had fled and fortified themselves, the “stench” of rotting livestock carcasses carried “for fifteen miles.”<sup>1</sup> These “fanatical” Creek warriors soon became known as Red Sticks—so-called for the red-painted war clubs they carried—and their actions kicked off what would become known as the Red Stick War (1813-14). Although American forces soon got involved in the conflict and fought against the Red Sticks, it initially began as something of a civil war between competing Creek factions. The tensions underlying the divisions were many, but they centered around the implications of the “civilization plan,” which the United States government and certain Creek leaders sought to implement amongst Creeks generally. These tensions played out in various local and personal contexts, but central to many of them, and central to the civilization plan, were disagreements about the role of livestock in Creek communities.

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<sup>1</sup> *Letters, Journals, and Writings of Benjamin Hawkins*, ed. C. L. Grant, 2 Vols. (Savannah, GA: Beehive Press, 1980) [hereafter LJWBH], 2:651-2.

Creeks had been interacting with livestock for nearly a century, but their presence in Creek communities increased dramatically following the American Revolution. Beginning in the 1790s, some Creeks began accumulating large numbers of livestock as part of the United States' policy of "civilizing" southeastern Indians. Benjamin Hawkins, the American agent responsible for dealing with Creeks, began offering cattle to Creek leaders who used these animals as a form of accumulated wealth to increase their power in Creek society. The idea behind funding Creek headmen was, on the one hand, to create a nucleus of leaders—which became the Creek National Council—through which the United States could exert influence over Creek politics. The reason livestock was so important to the plan, as Thomas Jefferson explained to Hawkins, was that it would "render their vast forests useless but for the range of cattle," which would "enable them to live on much smaller portions of land," and thus open up Creek lands for American settlement.<sup>2</sup>

Creeks began experimenting with the incorporation of cattle, hogs, chickens, and horses in the 1710s, and by the end of the century, domestic livestock had, for many Creeks, become an integral part of their daily lives. Horses gained acceptance most quickly, as they were useful for long-distance travel and for transporting goods. Some Creeks living near Spanish Florida participated in a burgeoning cattle-ranching economy, and Creeks elsewhere incorporated chickens, which provided eggs and meat and required little maintenance. But although livestock brought new opportunities, they also created a host of new problems. Cattle, hogs, and horses, for example, had a bad habit of trampling unfenced corn fields and garden plots in and around Creek towns. And while certain indigenous animals—deer, bears, raccoons, and various types of birds—had long presented problems for Creek agriculture, they were also fair game to be killed and eaten. Such was not the case with privately-owned livestock, which, whether the owner was

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Hawkins, 18 February 1803. [ finish citation, TJ Papers ]

Creek or European, if killed by someone other than the owner, was bound to create conflict. Livestock also competed with indigenous animals for forage. Deer hunting, in particular, was central to Creek livelihoods, as venison provided them with the vast majority of their meat intake, and the lucrative deerskin trade with the British was the primary means through which they accessed transatlantic trade goods. Before the nineteenth century, decisions about whether or not to incorporate livestock were made locally, as the primary political unit among Creeks was the talwa, or “town.”<sup>3</sup> This changed, however with the creation of the Creek National Council, which began promoting livestock ownership across all regions of Creek territory. In turn, local communities which had not previously sought to incorporate cattle and hogs were now faced with the proliferation of these animals. It is no surprise then that religious leaders from these communities—preaching that if Creeks killed the cattle, hogs, and chickens in Creek Country, the problems they faced, from denuded hunting grounds to American encroachment, would soon be alleviated<sup>4</sup>—were the ones who began the Red Stick movement, and that it was in these communities that the movement gained the most traction.

Over the last few decades environmental historians have developed increasingly sophisticated ways of thinking about the ecological impact of the spread of livestock in the Americas. Alfred Crosby, in 1986, sketched out the role of livestock as a crucial factor in European imperialism.<sup>5</sup> His ideas were taken further by other scholars, including Elinor Melville, whose *A Plague of Sheep* described the spread of sheep in central Mexico, which disrupted the

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<sup>3</sup> Joshua Piker, *Okfuskee: A Creek Town in Colonial America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> LJWBH, 2:688.

<sup>5</sup> Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), chapter 8.

existing ecological equilibrium so much so that entire regions became “fit only for sheep.”<sup>6</sup> More recent studies have paid closer attention to the conflicts livestock created between Indians and Europeans, and in Virginia DeJohn Anderson’s *Creatures of Empire*, Anderson argues that the arrival and spread of domesticated animals was the central cause of tension between Natives and British colonists. Though these studies discuss the detrimental effects of livestock in Native communities, they tend not to deal with the fact that many Native groups in North American often sought to alleviate these problems by owning livestock themselves. In Melville’s study of sheep, for example, she mentions almost in passing that “by 1600 Indian *caciques* and communities held over one third of the sheep stations in the Valle de Mezquital,” but because her study is predicated on the assumption that the presence of livestock is antithetical to Indian communities, she never attempts to understand what the purposeful incorporation—rather than the forced acceptance—of sheep might have meant for these communities.<sup>7</sup> Like the Indians in the Valle de Mezquital, many Creeks sought to incorporate livestock, and by examining what that incorporation looked like, we put ourselves in a position to explore not only the conflicts livestock created between Natives and Europeans but also the tensions they created within Native communities themselves.

Several historians of southeastern Indian history have understood that livestock played a role in exacerbating tensions that led to the Red Stick War. But none have understood the degree to which livestock was central to the concerns of Red Stick Creeks. In Joel Martin’s *Sacred Revolt*, Martin interprets Red Stick destruction of livestock as a renunciation of all things Euroamerican. Yet this does not allow him to explain why Red Sticks only killed particular kinds

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<sup>6</sup> Elinor G. K. Melville, *A Plague of Sheep: Environmental Consequences of the Conquest of Mexico* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

of livestock—cattle, hogs, and chickens, but not, for example, horses—and that they were not opposed to using other foreign goods, such as guns. Claudio Saunt, in *A New Order of Things*, argues that the primary cause of the Red Stick War was the rapid accumulation of wealth—most conspicuously in the form of livestock ownership—by Creek leaders funded by the United States government, which created rifts in Creek society. Thus, Red Stick Creeks opposed to the “new order” killed livestock as a “symbolic” attack on property accumulation. Saunt’s explanation helps us understand an important reason for Red Stick antipathy toward certain kinds of livestock. By examining the history of livestock incorporation among Creeks more broadly, however, we are able to see more clearly the multitude of ways in which livestock intruded on many aspects of Creek lives, opening us up to the notion that the Red Stick destruction of livestock was not merely a “symbolic” act.

Additionally, by examining the history of Creek interaction with livestock, we can begin to answer understand a question that continues to perplex historians who have studied the Red Stick War. As Gregory A. Waselkov writes, “The seams along which the fabric of Creek society parted have proven difficult to identify.”<sup>8</sup>

The primary geographical division in Creek Country was that between the Upper Towns and the Lower Towns, and proponents of the Red Stick movement came primarily from the former. The Upper Towns were concentrated on the Coosa, Tallapoosa, and Alabama Rivers, which were farther “up” the trading path from British ports on the Atlantic coast, while the Lower Towns were situated primarily on the Chattahoochee and Flint Rivers in the eastern portions of Creek territory (see image I). Creeks in the Lower Towns had a longer history of

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<sup>8</sup> Gregory A. Waselkov, *A Conquering Spirit: Fort Mims and the Red Stick War of 1813-1814* (Tuscaloosa, 2006), 90.



livestock incorporation that did Creeks in the Upper Towns. On the one hand, they were better situated to take advantage of cattle markets in Spanish Florida and in southern British colonies. Additionally, their proximity to British settlements put them at greater risk of land encroachment, which greatly diminished their hunting grounds. In turn, over the course of the eighteenth century, they slowly began, often reluctantly, to rely on livestock as a substitute for their declining access to game. For Upper Creeks, meanwhile, whose hunting grounds remained more or less intact for much of the eighteenth century, and who could thus rely more exclusively on deer hunting for food and access to European markets, the prospect of incorporating livestock seemed only to create problems. With the proliferation of livestock throughout Creek Country in the nineteenth century, Upper Creeks were thus less prepared to cope with the dramatic changes that domestic animals brought to their communities. And to combat the problems the animals presented, it was Creeks in these towns that sought to eradicate cattle, hogs, and horses during the Red Stick War. To fully understand Red Stick intentions during the war, we will begin with a general sketch of livestock ownership among the Creeks in the century before the war, and then move on to a discussion of Red Sticks and livestock during the war itself.

Lower Town Creeks began incorporating livestock into their economic systems as early as 1716. What is now the Florida panhandle had been largely depopulated by Indian slave raids on Spanish missions less than a decade earlier, and the abandoned fields were said to “abound in cattle.”<sup>9</sup> These fields were easy to reach from Creek towns on the Chattahoochee River (i.e.

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<sup>9</sup> “Diego Pena’s Expedition to Apalachee and Apalachicola in 1716: A Journal Translated and with an Introduction,” ed. Mark F. Boyd, *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 28:1 (Jul., 1949), 18. Two decades later there were said to be thousands of cattle in the “Apalachie fields”: *The Colonial Records of the State of Georgia*, eds. Allen D. Chandler et al. (Atlanta, 1976), Vol. 32, p. 280. [WRG]

Lower Creek towns), and Spanish officials, facing a shortage of supplies in St. Augustine, began offering to pay Indians to “collect all [the] cattle” and “deliver them to St. Augustine.”<sup>10</sup> Lower Creek participation in the livestock trade grew, in large part because it complemented nicely the economic activities they already engaged in, primarily hunting and agriculture. There were two Spanish livestock roundups per year—one in Spring and one in Fall—both of which worked well with the subsistence cycles of Lower Creeks. For Creek men, the two most important deer hunting seasons were in the summer and winter, with the winter hunt being the most important. It typically lasted from October until the end of March, at which point the men returned to their towns and assisted in clearing for the new crop, which was then planted in May. The Spring roundup took place right in between these clearing and planting obligations, and the Fall roundup took place just before men were needed in town again at the harvest.<sup>11</sup> As a result, Lower Town Creeks could engage in this informal cattle trade with little disruption to their existing economic strategies.

In addition to this seasonal interaction with cattle, many Creeks also began taking part in illicit livestock trading. Lower Creeks, in particular, were well-placed between British and Spanish markets, which allowed them to exploit both by stealing cattle and horses from one region, and then driving and selling them in another.<sup>12</sup> Upper Creeks took part in this as well, but because their geographical position west of the Lower Towns, they were not as much involved

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<sup>10</sup> “Diego Pena’s Expedition to Apalachee and Apalachicola in 1716, p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> Joshua Piker, *Okfuskee: A Creek Town in Colonial America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 79-82; Richard A. Sattler, “Cowboys and Indians: Creek and Seminole Stock Raising, 1700-1900,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 22:3 (1998), 82.

<sup>12</sup> This illicit trade is not well-documented, but there are many reports of Creeks driving off cattle and horses from Spanish and British settlements, just as there are reports of Creeks selling them. See for example, William Bartram, *William Bartram on the Southeastern Indians*, eds. Gregory A. Waselkov and Kathryn E. Holland Braund (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 118. [WRG PG] [Add others from Pena, Delgado, and maybe that guy in Miccosukee.]

with cattle driving. Nevertheless, they did steal and resell (or keep for themselves) horses with some frequency, especially from the British. The problem got so bad in some British colonies that it became “highly illegal” to purchase a horse from an Indian, though such rules did not seem to help, as horse thefts remained a constant source of conflict throughout the century. Some Upper Creeks even stole horses from deerskin traders and then make them purchase the animals back at “an Extravagant rate.”<sup>13</sup>

In addition to dealing with livestock outside of Creek towns, European animals also began to play an increasingly important role in Creek domestic life. Of all the new animals, though, horses and chickens gained the greatest degree of acceptance across all Creek regions. Horses were useful as pack animals and for more rapid over-ground travel, and were comparative easy to maintain. Although they sometimes fell ill to disease, as long as there were grasses and canebrakes nearby, they were generally unobtrusive.<sup>14</sup> And so by the early 1770s, according to a British deerskin trader, “almost every one” in Creek Country owned “horses, from two to a dozen.”<sup>15</sup> Chickens were also relatively easy to incorporate, as they could roost in raised coops on the outskirts of villages, and thus did not harm crops, and so by 1764, a European traveller noted Creeks “have fowels” in nearly “every village.”<sup>16</sup> Cattle and hogs did not gain the same kind of universal acceptance that horses and chickens did, but as early as the 1730s, some Creeks began experimenting with keeping cattle and hogs in and around their towns. On the Chattahoochee River, for example, the town of Coweta was said to have “plenty of hogs,”

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<sup>13</sup> W. Noel Salisbury, ed. *Records in the British Public Records Office Relating to South Carolina, 1663-1782*, 5/70: 254-255 (I got this source from Dr. Piker, but I have not seen the microfilm yet). See also [dump in horse theft sources from ASPIA]

<sup>14</sup> LJWBH, 1: 22, 26-7, 158.

<sup>15</sup> James Adair, *The History Of The American Indians, Particularly Those Nations adjoining to the Mississippi, East And West Florida, Georgia, South And North Carolina, And Virginia*. . . . (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1775), p. 231.

<sup>16</sup> Campbell, 157.

roughly one hundred cows and steers—likely driven up from Florida—and “a few carolina Cattle.”<sup>17</sup> Although some Creeks would begin fencing livestock later in the century, at this point, the cattle and hogs in these towns were semi-feral. Hogs rooted around in the woods, eating acorns, roots, and forbs, while cattle grazed on canebrakes near creeks or on overgrown grass in abandoned fields.<sup>18</sup> But even though Lower Creeks had begun incorporating cattle and hogs, these animals made up a small portion of Creek diets until the turn of the nineteenth century, as venison continued to be the most important source of meat.<sup>19</sup> The benefit of keeping cattle and hogs was that it allowed Creeks to use the animals as a saleable commodity and a store of value, as well as for emergency food when crops failed or when Creek men had unsuccessful hunting seasons.

Although livestock could be incorporated into existing economic strategies, it also created new issues for Creek communities. Early on, horses presented a problem for Creek agriculture. In the 1720s, Creek headmen complained about horses belonging to European deerskin traders “come into their Corn, and destroy their Provision.”<sup>20</sup> Because women were the primary agriculturalists in Creek society, they were especially perturbed by animal intrusions on their crops. One deerskin trader said that Creek women would frequently “scold [the horses] and give them ill names,” occasionally “striking a tomohawk into the horse, if it does not observe the

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<sup>17</sup> *Colonial Records of the State of Georgia*, p. 280 [WRG]

<sup>18</sup> LJWBH, 1:6 [WRG]; Campbell, 157 [WRG].

<sup>19</sup> Lisa O’Steen, “Animal Remains,” in *Archaeology of the Lower Muskogee Creek Indians, 1715-1836*, ed. H. Thomas Foster II (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007), pp. 194-255. It is interesting also to note that, according to James Adair, Creeks “reckon all those animals to be unclean, that are either carnivorous, or live on nasty food; as hogs, wolves, panthers, foxes, cats, mice, rats.” Thus, he said, Creeks always refused to eat hogs. However, it is difficult to take him at his word since one of his central claims in the book is that the Indians of North America descended from the Lost Tribes of Israel, which likely colored the way he wrote about Creek views about eating pork.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Piker, *Okfuskee*, 125.

friendly caution they give him.”<sup>21</sup> But cattle and hogs were more consistently a problem on this front. And in addition to trampling crops with far greater frequency than horses, they presented additional ecological problems. Cattle competed with deer for forage, and hogs ate the acorns that Creek women collected to make oil.<sup>22</sup> Creeks also at times associated the presence of cattle with the emergence of new diseases. In the 1760s, a deerskin trade wrote, “the Indians were struck with a disease, which they were unacquainted with before,” and called it “the cattle’s distemper.” At first they decided “either to kill all the cattle, or send them immediately off their land” in the hopes of “prevent[ing] the like mischief, or greater ills from befalling” them. Although they were concerned about disease—and also that “the cattle would spoil their open corn-fields”—one of the head warriors ultimately persuaded them to keep “a few cattle.”<sup>23</sup>

But while Creeks in all regions became intimately familiar with various kinds of livestock during the eighteenth century, the changes these new animals brought varied greatly depending on the region. This was especially so in the case of cattle. Creeks living in the western parts of Creek Country—the Upper Towns—had the least incentive of all Creeks to incorporate cattle into their communities. One Upper Creek headman, seeking to make clear the difference between British food production and that of their own, told an Anglo traveller, “When you are at home your Dyet is kept more under Command. Your Chatle are kept in large pens and Likewise your Sheep; your Turkeys and Ducks are at your Doores. Now with us its not so. We are forced to hunt and Take a Great deale of pains To get our provissiones befor we eat it.”<sup>24</sup> One reason for

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<sup>21</sup> James Adair, *The History Of The American Indians, Particularly Those Nations adjoining to the Mississippi, East And West Florida, Georgia, South And North Carolina, And Virginia*. . . . (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1775), p. 406.

<sup>22</sup> LJWBH, 1:14; Campbell, 157 [WRG]. More on the ecological implications below.

<sup>23</sup> Adair, *The History of the American Indians*, p. 132.

<sup>24</sup> “Captain Finch’s Journal to the Creeks, 1725,” in Newton D. Mereness, *Travels in the American Colonies* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1916), 190.

this was that the Upper Towns were situated at a greater distance from Euroamerican cattle markets. But perhaps more importantly, for most of the eighteenth century, the Upper Towns were less hemmed in by Anglo-American encroachment and thus had larger hunting grounds, which meant that they had little need to supplement their hunting and agricultural practices through the keeping and trading of cattle. Without that need, the idea of keeping cattle seemed to have only negative consequences. When the British proposed to build a fort among the Upper Creeks in the 1750s, for example, the headmen refused, saying, “If there is a Fort there must be Cattle and other Stocks to supply your Wants. We have no Fences to keep them out of our Corn.” They continued that when a traders’ horse “happens to eat a little of our Corn, we shoot or chop them with a Hatchet, which causes Disturbances,” and that if cattle were to come, the amount of corn destroyed and number of “Disturbances” would be “much more.”<sup>25</sup> Two decades later, when an Upper Creek headman heard that the British planned to drive some cattle to the head of the Coosa River—the westernmost river in Upper Creek Country—he said, “We Hope they have not,” as “it was agreed that no Cattle should be drove thro the nation but that the Path should always be Kept green.”<sup>26</sup> Perhaps, by suggesting that the presence of cattle would lead to an un-green path, the headman understood that cattle not only trampled crops, but also trampled the grasses eaten by deer and other indigenous animals, which diminished their ability to kill game.<sup>27</sup> And indeed, by the nineteenth century, as cattle spread throughout Upper Creek territory, deer had “become so scarce as no longer to be relied on for more than amusement.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> William L. McDowell, Jr., ed., *The Colonial Records of South Carolina: Documents Relating to Indian Affairs, 1750-1765*, 2 Vols. (Columbia, SC, 1970), 1: 153-154.

<sup>26</sup> Salisbury, ed. *Records in the British Public Records Office Relating to South Carolina*, 347.

<sup>27</sup> While the connection between increasing cattle and decreasing deer populations is not exactly explicit here, it would be made so in the coming years, as we will see below.

<sup>28</sup> LJWBH, 2:537.

But while many Upper Towns continued, in the eighteenth century, to resist the presence of cattle in their towns and on their hunting grounds, Lower Creeks in the eastern portions of Creek Country began to incorporate cattle to a much greater degree. In the Lower Creek town of Coweta, which had acquired cattle and hogs in the 1730s, many of the town's residents, by the end of the eighteenth century, had moved outside of the main town and onto smaller settlements, and had begun fencing their crops.<sup>29</sup> The cattle and hogs in the area remained semi-feral, as fences were built not to keep livestock in, but to keep the animals out of their crops. But the rising number of cattle and the resulting need for fences created increasingly dispersed settlement patterns. In Apalachicola, for example, the naturalist William Bartram noted that residents lived in small, scattered villages, having abandoned their more compact settlement twenty years before when they went in search of new farms and "convenient and extensive range" for their livestock.<sup>30</sup> In at least one case, this process affected an Upper Town as well. A leading headman in the Upper Town of Okfuskee, White Lieutenant, had spent time on the Chattahoochee River among the Lower Towns and decided to take up cattle ranching. But because the fields in Okfuskee were not fenced, he was forced to create a new town in Lower Creek Country, Little Okfuskee, which effectively split up the main town. As Joshua Piker notes of Okfuskee—and which holds true in other towns as well—this process of town dispersal tended to "disrupt interpersonal relations" and "undermine community."<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, in both Upper and Lower Creek towns, decisions about the incorporation of cattle continued to be determined locally in response to differing sets of circumstances. This would no longer be the case, however, by the nineteenth century, as increasingly powerful Creek leaders, depending for

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<sup>29</sup> LJWBH, 1:308.

<sup>30</sup> Gregory A. Waselkov and Kathryn E. Holland Braund, eds., *William Bartram on the Southeastern Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 91-2.

<sup>31</sup> Piker, *Okfuskee*, 118-134.

their power on wealth derived from cattle ranching, began grazing their animals throughout the region.

Just before the War for American Independence got underway, a British colonist named William Bartram was commissioned to visit the southeastern Indians to determine “whether they were inclined to adopt the European modes of civil society,” and “whether such a reformation could be obtained, without using coercive or violent means.”<sup>32</sup> The prevailing notion was that western expansion by Anglo colonists was inevitable, and so Bartram was sent to figure out whether or not that expansion could happen without the violent removal of Indians. Most southeastern Indians lifestyles depended on having large, seasonally-occupied hunting grounds away from their towns. But as the population of Anglo-American colonists grew, frontier farmers began putting intense pressure on these lands, and the problem accelerated following American Revolution. Frontier violence escalated, and so many American officials began advocating plans to urge Creeks to abandon deer hunting and to take up cattle ranching, which required less land. According to Thomas Jefferson, the goal with regard to the Creeks was to “familiarize them to the idea that it is for their interest to cede lands at times to the U S, and for us thus to procure gratifications to our citizens, from time to time, by new acquisitions of land.”<sup>33</sup> Despite this somewhat convoluted language, Jefferson stated his intentions more clearly in a letter to Andrew Jackson in which he wrote that the two main goals of U.S. policy toward the Creeks were “1. The preservation of peace; 2. The obtaining [of their] lands.”<sup>34</sup> And the best way

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<sup>32</sup> William Bartram, *William Bartram on the Southeastern Indians*, eds. Gregory A. Waselkov and Kathryn E. Holland Braund (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 34.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Hawkins, 18 February 1803, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, gen. ed. Barbara B. Oberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 39: 548.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Waselkov, 73.



to obtain those lands, he thought, was to “render their vast forests useless but for the range of cattle.”<sup>35</sup>

In order to achieve this, the United States government hatched a “civilization plan” designed to transform southeastern Indians into yeoman farmers that owned herds of livestock and producing export crops. As part of the 1790 Treaty of New York, signed between Creek leaders and the United States following a period of intense frontier violence, Creeks were to “be led to a greater degree of civilization” by “becom[ing] herdsmen and cultivators, instead of remaining in a state of hunters.” In order bring that about, the treaty said, “the United States will, from time to time, furnish gratuitously the said nation with useful domestic animals, and implements of husbandry.”<sup>36</sup> Benjamin Hawkins was put in charge of the plan among the Creeks, and made his way into Creek Country in 1796. Travelling through Cherokee towns on his way to the Creeks, he was optimistic about his ability to make the plan a reality when he saw a Cherokee man with a fenced farm and a “large stock of cattle and some hogs.”<sup>37</sup> But when he reached the first Creek towns on the Tallapoosa River (in Upper Creek territory), he was unimpressed when he found that “they have but a few fowls and hogs,” and he thus considered them “much poorer than their neighbors the Cherokees.”<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, he found other reasons for optimism in the suitability of the land to host cattle. Everywhere he went, he was on the lookout for potential cattle forage. In his journals, he noted in great detail where the best

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 547.

<sup>36</sup> Walter Lowrie and Matthew St. Claire Clarke, eds., *American State Papers, Documents, Legislative and Executive, of the Congress of the United States, 1789-1815, Volume II, Indian Affairs* (Washington D.C.: Gales & Seton, 1832), [hereafter, ASPIA], 82.

<sup>37</sup> LJWBH, 1:8.

<sup>38</sup> LJWBH, 1:12.

canebrakes were and whether or not there were mosses on the river bottoms, which would feed the large numbers of cattle he envisioned populating the region.<sup>39</sup>

Hawkins soon set up a base of operation, the “Creek agency,” among the Lower Creeks, as they had a greater degree of familiarity with livestock. British and then American encroachment on Lower Creek lands had taken away much of their hunting grounds, and according to Hawkins, “the business of hunting has already ... become insufficient to furnish cloathing and subsistence.”<sup>40</sup> Many Lower Creek leaders were thus more open to Hawkins’s ideas, and they were given cattle and cash payments for complying with the plan.<sup>41</sup> But Hawkins knew he also needed to get Upper Town Creeks involved, and he decided the best way to do this was to create a handful of influential leaders among them, who would receive annual payments for being part of a National Council, which was overseen by Hawkins.<sup>42</sup> Because Hawkins was well-equipped with funds, it was not difficult to find Creek leaders who were willing to oblige. In turn, he managed to create a class of leaders that were increasingly wealthy and who owned privately large herds of livestock. It is no surprise then that at the first law passed by the National Council concerned the coordinated punishment of “thieves and mischiefmakers,” as this gave them protection for their newly accumulated private wealth.<sup>43</sup>

The creation of a National Council deteriorated the local autonomy of Creek towns, which was the level at which most important decisions had been made during the eighteenth century. At Council meetings, policies were decided upon that affected all Creeks—including the

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<sup>39</sup> In his travel journals, Hawkins talks about cane and reeds on practically every page. Most commonly, when arriving to a new creek, he would write “cane on the creeks and reed on the branches.” See, for example, 1: 36, 44, 248 (These page numbers are for the quotation in particular. I couldn’t possibly list all the places he talks about cane and reed). For moss, see, for example, 1: 15, 19, 36, 292, 353.

<sup>40</sup> LJWBH, 2:455.

<sup>41</sup> For annuity payments, see, for example, LJWBH, 2: 443-44, 502.

<sup>42</sup> LJWBH, 1: 316-17.

<sup>43</sup> LJWBH, 1: 317.

sale of land and the creation of all manner of new laws—but participation in these discussions was highly restricted.<sup>44</sup> When Creeks not included in the Council began opposing its policies, as well as its very existence, Hawkins said the Council would treat “the opposition with friendly attention” and allow them “to discuss freely all subjects which they feel an interest,” but only if they had adopted livestock and used “ploughs, axes, seed wheat, cards, [and] spinning wheels” (i.e. the tools of export-oriented agriculture). Otherwise, they could not participate.<sup>45</sup> Opposition to the Council’s policies came from within as well. One Upper Creek leader, Efau Haujo—the most vocal councilmember against Americans driving cattle onto Upper Creek lands—said at one meeting,

It is not stock only we complain of. We find the houses [of “whites”] are built upon our lands, and fields are cleared and cultivated. We shall wait a reasonable time to give an opportunity to the Offices of Government [i.e. the National Council], whose business it is to attend to such things, to move those white people off.... and if they do not move off, we shall consider those things as our property and act accordingly.<sup>46</sup>

Because he was prepared to let his townspeople act outside the authority of the Council, Efau Haujo was promptly removed from his position, and replaced by Hopoie Micco, who Hawkins described as “intent on the plan of civilization, [and] desirous to introduce a regular & efficient Government among his people.”<sup>47</sup>

Efau Haujo had always been something of an outlier among the members of the National Council. He was the most prominent headman in the Upper Towns when Hawkins arrived, and

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<sup>44</sup> For some of these decisions, see, for example, Walter Lowrie and Matthew St. Claire Clarke, eds., *American State Papers, Documents, Legislative and Executive, of the Congress of the United States, 1789-1815, Volume II, Indian Affairs* (Washington D.C.: Gales & Seton, 1832), 637, 690, 698.

<sup>45</sup> LJWBH, 2: 488.

<sup>46</sup> LJWBH, 2: 450.

<sup>47</sup> LJWBH, 2:450.

so Hawkins knew he would need to get him on board if his plans were to take hold among the Upper Creeks. Yet most Upper Creeks continued to oppose the implications of civilization plan, and according to Hawkins, Efau Haujo and other Upper Creeks continued to adhere to “the ancient habits.”<sup>48</sup> But even if hunting was still possible, it was not possible for Efau Haujo to ignore that their hunting grounds continued to be circumscribed by “the white people [who are] pressing for land on the frontiers of Georgia[,] on Tombigbee at the Natchez district[,] and on the frontiers of Tennessee.” As a result, he told Hawkins the “wants” of people in the Upper Towns “are now pressing.”<sup>49</sup> The solution, Hawkins told him, was to convince other Upper Town headmen “to consent to sell their waste lands [i.e. their hunting grounds] for present use, and to meet their future wants,” and also to teach “the young people ... to raise stock and to spin [cloth].”<sup>50</sup> Although Efau Haujo told Hawkins that he believed him to be “a true friend of the red people,” he never complied with such demands. Even when Hawkins gave him “5 black slaves [and] a stock of cattle and horses,” telling him, “Put your negros and family to work, make them pen and milk your cattle, [and] let me see your fields enlarged and well fenced,” he later noted that the slaves and cattle remained “of little use to him.”<sup>51</sup>

Although Efau Haujo was the only Council Chief to pose serious critiques of the National Council, there were other headmen, influential in many of the Upper Towns, who opposed the civilization plan, and who were never a part the Council. Hawkins referred to them as “old Chiefs”—as opposed to the new “progressive” Council Chiefs—and he was constantly frustrated that they “continued ... to talk of old former times when game was plenty” and when “British

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<sup>48</sup> LJWBH, 1:292.

<sup>49</sup> LJWBH, 2:409.

<sup>50</sup> LJWBH, 2: 410-11.

<sup>51</sup> LJWBH, 1:292, 2:411.

agents used to court, carress and accommodate all the idlers in the nation.”<sup>52</sup> These headmen were also frustrated with Hawkins, because although he claimed to be “a true friend of the red people,” all they really got from him were his “continued offers ... to help them with implements of husbandry, spinning, weaving and stock raising,” which, they said, they “did not understand the use of, and which could be of no use” for their “immediate wants.”<sup>53</sup> What they wanted instead was to be able to choose for themselves the trade goods they received, as they had been able to do with the British, who had, in the eighteenth century, needed Creeks as allies in the contested southeastern borderlands. But because imperial competition was now virtually nonexistent, their bargaining power was severely limited, and all the Americans were now willing to give them were tools and animals meant to reduce their land holdings.

Naturally, this was not a position they wished to be in, and so when the War of 1812 got underway, many Creeks in the Upper Towns gladly welcomed the Spanish and British agents who promised them arms and ammunition if they would fight against the Americans. While there were reports in 1812 that “the Upper Creeks instigated threats” against frontier American settlements near the Upper Towns, it was not until the following year, once they had acquired a greater supply of guns and powder, that they began systematic attacks. While the British and Spanish wanted combatant Creeks to attack only American forces, now that they had access to the supplies of ammunition they needed, they were under no obligation to operate under the direction of these European powers. One British officer called the Red Stick Creeks “a bad sort of wandering Indians,” and “wild,” ungovernable “man eaters.” But because the British needed allies wherever they could find them, he was forced “to find and give them presents” of “arms

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<sup>52</sup> LJWBH, 2:407.

<sup>53</sup> LJWBH, 2:407.

and clothing, and ammunition.”<sup>54</sup> With this, Red Sticks from the Upper Towns could attack whoever they saw fit, and so, in addition to American settlements, they also began attacking the animals and humans they had developed such contempt for: cattle and Council Chiefs.

The Red Sticks began by killing nine headmen for their association with the “treaty with [George] Washington,” or the Treaty of New York, which created the “civilization plan.”<sup>55</sup> When other targeted headmen fled, Red Sticks began “destroy[ing] ... at the upper towns all the cattle, hogs and fowls.”<sup>56</sup> The significance that Red Sticks tied to killing cattle, in particular, can be seen in their war symbols. The “magical banner” of the Red Stick party was “a red staff” (hence the name Red Sticks), at the end of which was tied “a large cow’s tail, dyed red.”<sup>57</sup> They also wore cow tails on their arms, letting the hairs at the end hang from their wrists.<sup>58</sup> Such symbols tended to mirror the manner in which Creeks dealt with human scalps, suggesting that Creeks viewed cattle as autonomous beings who were enemies in their own right. When human scalps were taken, Creek men often cut off the hair and added it to the end of their own during battles, which allowed them to borrow the power of the enemy warrior.<sup>59</sup> This might also have been the purpose behind attaching the hairs of cow tails to themselves. Additionally, when Red Sticks took human scalps, they hung them on large red-dyed poles in town centers, which may have been part of the reason they tied the cow tails to the end of their red-dyed war clubs.<sup>60</sup> The

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<sup>54</sup> Walter Lowrie and Matthew St. Claire Clarke, eds., *American State Papers, Documents, Legislative and Executive, of the Congress of the United States, 1789-1815, Volume II, Indian Affairs* (Washington D.C.: Gales & Seton, 1832), [hereafter, ASPIA] 846.

<sup>55</sup> LJWBH, 2:647.

<sup>56</sup> LJWBH, 2:651.

<sup>57</sup> H. S. Halbert and T. H. Ball, *The Creek War of 1813 and 1814*, ed. Frank L. Owsley, Jr. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1969), 189. Though the title makes this seem like a secondary source, Halbert and Ball were actually contemporaries who conducted many interviews with Americans who witnessed or were part of the fighting during the Red Stick War.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* 187.

<sup>59</sup> Personal conversation with Andrew Frank, professor of history at Florida State University. Fall, 2012.

<sup>60</sup> Creeks had been doing this with scalps in the eighteenth century as well. But for Red Stick example, see Halbert and Ball, 257.

correlation between the treatment of human scalps and cow tails points to the significance Red Sticks placed on killing them and suggests that Red Sticks thought of them, as with humans, as autonomous beings that were enemies in their own right. And in one instance, at the Battle of Holy Ground, a Red Stick armed only with a cow tail, meant to provide symbolic protection, put himself “in full view of the [enemy] garrison,” and sought to encourage “his warriors” by “leap[ing] to and fro” and “waving his cow tail,” which he did until “a bullet from the fort ended his prophetic career forever.”<sup>61</sup>

In the early stages of the conflict, Red Sticks were made up almost solely of Creeks from the Upper Towns, who had the strongest objections to the introduction of widespread cattle ownership.<sup>62</sup> And if we look at the people and places they first attacked, the connection between them and livestock ownership is quite clear. The first signs that a large-scale war might soon get underway came when a group of Creeks attacked American settlements as well as a Creek man named Tussekiah Micco, who lived in Upper Creek territory, and who Benjamin Hawkins considered “as friendly as I could wish.”<sup>63</sup> Tussekiah Micco had been at the conferences in New York when the civilization plan was born, and upon his return to Creek Country, he decided to create a new town of cattle and hog ranchers. He and his friend Dog Warrior moved to a place that Upper Creeks knew as “our beloved bear ground,” and settled there with cattle and hogs.<sup>64</sup> They also “made it a rule to admit no neighbours who will not make fences,” implying that everyone there had to be on board with the widespread livestock ownership he envisioned. One of the problems with this for other Upper Creeks, however, was that this region had the highest bear populations in Creek Country (hence the name “beloved bear ground”), which were animals

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<sup>61</sup> Halbert and Ball, 191.

<sup>62</sup> [ BH ]

<sup>63</sup> LJWBH, 1:64.

<sup>64</sup> LJWBH, 1:42.

that Creeks valued for meat, fur, and especially for the oil they could derive from bear fat. But according to Tussekiah Micco, “as the cattle increases and the bear decreases,” the region was becoming no longer “of value for bear.”<sup>65</sup> Because of his insistence the everyone in the town own cattle and hogs, and because he ultimately decimated populations of indigenous animals valued by many Upper Creeks, it is not surprising that he was among the initial Red Stick targets.

The town of Tuckabatchee was the site of the most intense conflict early in the war. It was also the first Upper Creek town to acquire cattle in large numbers. In 1772, headmen there owned “about one hundred and fifty cattle,” and by 1800, Hawkins wrote, “They have lately begun to settle out in villages for the advantage of wood and raising stock.”<sup>66</sup> This was also where Hawkins’s interpreter to the Upper Creeks, a “half breed” named Alexander Cornells, lived with his large herds of livestock. Although Red Sticks threatened to kill him, they ultimately let him go, but not before they “burnt [his] houses” and killed “his cattle, hogs, horses, sheep and goats.”<sup>67</sup> The situation was similar in Okfuskee, where Red Sticks “destroyed almost all the cattle in town,” the majority of which was owned by the Grayson family. Mr. Grayson was a Scottish-born trader living in the town, and his wife (also Scottish) was there to “teach women to spin and weave,” which were export-oriented skills tied up with the civilization plan. And so, with Mrs. Grayson,<sup>68</sup> Red Sticks “stripped her” not only of “all her cattle and hogs,” but also of “her loom and bolt of cloth,” as well as the clothes she wore that were made from them.<sup>69</sup> And finally, in the town of Kialijee, which had little livestock when Hawkins first arrived, but

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<sup>65</sup> LJWBH, 1: 42, 294.

<sup>66</sup> Taitt, 254; LJWBH, 1:20.

<sup>67</sup> LJWBH, 2: 648.

<sup>68</sup> Hawkins only refers to them as Mr. and Mrs. Grayson, so I don’t know they first names.

<sup>69</sup> LJWBH, 2: 652.



which had since become one of the most “friendly” towns to the plan of civilization, Red Sticks killed “several of its inhabitants,” as well as “all their hogs, cattle and fowls.”<sup>70</sup>

By killing these animals, Red Sticks were attempting to reverse the processes that were destroying their autonomy. Livestock were the main source of wealth for Council Chiefs who increasingly operated without the consent of most Upper Creeks. They drove away deer and bear that Upper Creeks hunted, at the same time as Council Chiefs began selling away their hunting grounds. Now that they had ready access to arms and ammunition, they could choose one more their own direction, and they took the opportunity to rid the region of the people and animals that were at the root of these problems. In effect, Red Sticks were reasserting their ability to control decisions about the manner in which they did or did not want to incorporate livestock, a power they had lost over the course of the past couple of decades.

At the heart of Red Stick actions was also the belief that by “kill[ing] the cattle, the hogs, and fowls,” there would be an inverse increase in the number of “buffalo, bear, elk, deer, turkeys, ducks, wild geese.”<sup>71</sup> While they had witnessed, over past decades, the reverse occur—the decline of indigenous animals and the simultaneous increase in domestic ones—this aspect of their plan never came to pass. By the following summer, “Famine ha[d] tamed or destroyed many” Red Sticks, and a significant number of them had to surrendered at American forts, which promised food to those who quit hostilities.<sup>72</sup> The British and Spanish in Florida were likewise short on supplies, and when a group of Red Sticks went to Pensacola, they found that there was

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<sup>70</sup> LJWBH, 1:304; 2:652.

<sup>71</sup> LJWBH, 2:688. The inclusion of buffalo and elk is somewhat strange. Buffalo did, in fact, exist in Creek Country in the early eighteenth century, but it is unlikely that by 1813 there were any Creeks who had had much experience with these animals. Elk, meanwhile, had never been know in the southeast. Its inclusion is almost certainly due to the influence of Shawnee Indians from the Great Lakes region who assisted the Red Stick movement.

<sup>72</sup> LJWBH, 2: 682-83, 685, 688 (quote), 715-17; ASPIA, 841.

neither sufficient food to feed them nor ammunition to arm them. They were told that provisions were supposed to be arriving in Apalachicola, but many died before they got there.<sup>73</sup> As a result of such pressing scarcities, whenever the remaining Red Sticks attacked Creek towns or American settlements that had livestock, they no longer killed the animals but drove them off, to keep and eat.<sup>74</sup> American forces joined the fight against Red Sticks almost from the beginning, and although they faced supply issues of their own, they had few issues getting the beef and wheat they needed to outlast the Red Sticks.

When the war finally ended, the results were devastating for the vast majority of Creeks. Many, of course, died in the fighting. And many Red Sticks who survived were punished for having taken part. But even Creeks who fought against the Red Sticks had to pay a price. The Treaty of Fort Jackson, which marked the official end of the war, was negotiated on the Creek side by the National Council, who agreed to cede more than 20,000,000 acres of Creek lands across both the Upper and Lower Towns. Those who made the deal were given large cash payments, while most Creeks received little or nothing in return. Moreover, the civilization plan was thereafter deemed a failure, and that played a significant role in Removal discussion that took place in the 1820s and 1830s, which resulted in the forced relocation of thousands of Creeks to Oklahoma. Red Sticks could never have predicted such results, but they were certainly aware that by attacking American settlements and by striking back against the most crucial components of the civilization plan, there was a good chance they would go up against the full weight of the United States. But when given the opportunity to reclaim a life of their own choosing, they did not hesitate to attempt it.

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<sup>73</sup> LJWBH, 2: 689.

<sup>74</sup> LJWBH, 2: 694; Richard S. Lackey, ed., *Frontier Claims in the Lower South: Records of Claims Filed by Citizens of the Alabama and Timbigbee River Settlements in the Mississippi Territory for Depredations by the Creek Indians During the War of 1812* (New Orleans: Polyanthos, 1977), 24, 32, *passim*.

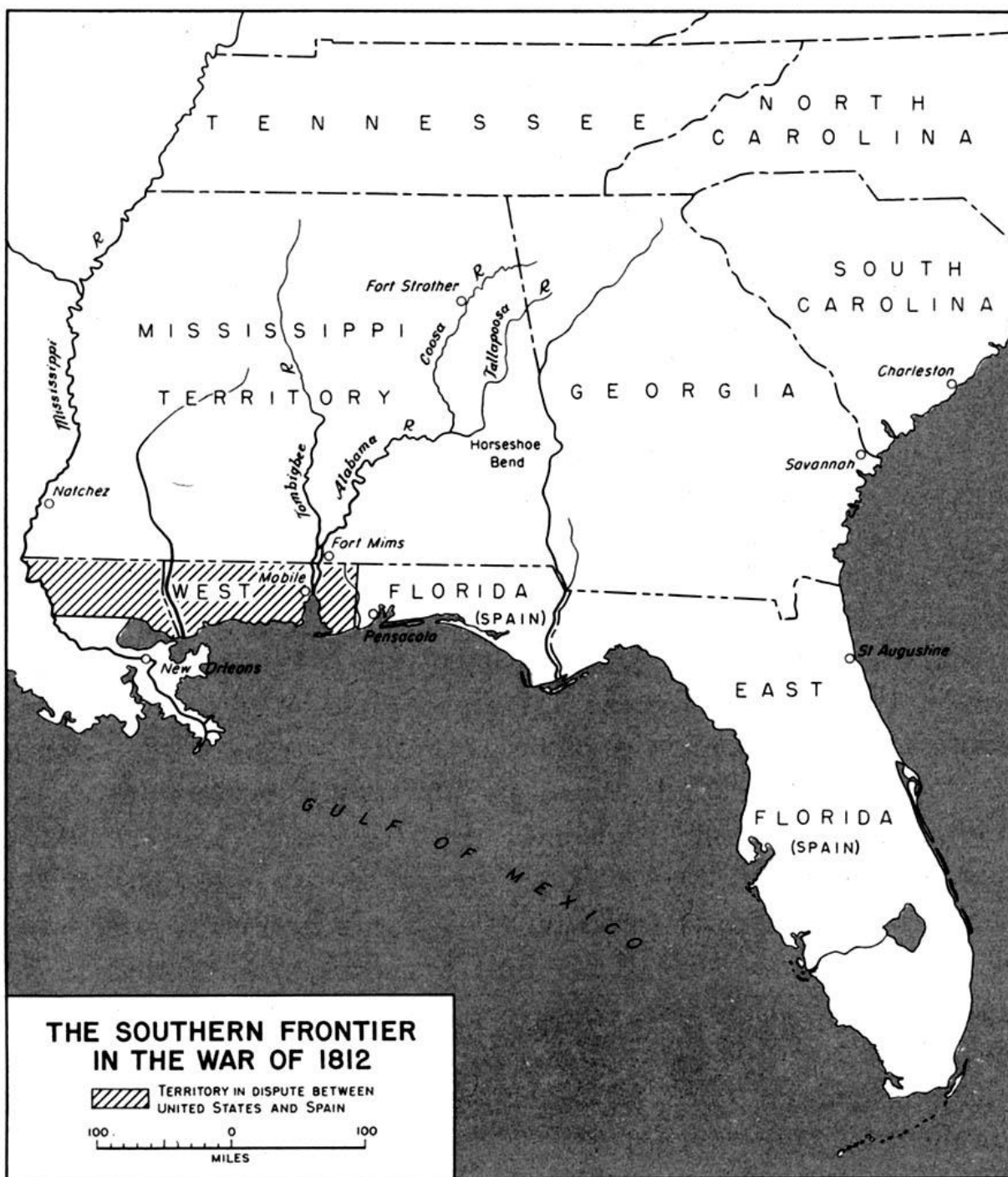


Image I. <http://www.history.army.mil/books/AMH/Map06-17.jpg>

Although not labeled on the map, the Chattahoochee River is the one separating the southern half of Georgia from the Mississippi Territory. Lower Creeks lived along the Chattahoochee, as well as on rivers farther east. Upper Creeks lived on the Coosa, Tallapoosa, and Alabama. The central portions of western Mississippi Territory and eastern Georgia were recognized by the United States as belonging to the Creek Nation, even though the map does not make it appear that way.

## Stories of Osceola: American Myth-Making from Removal to Abolition

As an undergraduate student at Florida State, I took a course on Native American history in my second semester. On the first day of class, the professor asked everyone to write down the names of up to five Native Americans. Few people could actually muster five names in any case, but almost everybody could come up with at least two: Pocahontas and Osceola. Given that Osceola was and is the mascot of FSU—or, as the university insists, for political reasons, a “symbol” of the school, not a “mascot”—and given that an image of his face could, for that reason, be seen on several students’ clothes that day, it is not surprising that everyone in the class was at least somewhat familiar with him. Although the ubiquity with which our class knew the name “Osceola” would not be matched at other universities, my sense is that, alongside figures like Squanto, Tecumseh, Sacajawea, and Sitting Bull, Osceola would show up on quite a few “top 5” lists (at least among college football fans). But no matter where we decide to place Osceola in the pantheon of famous Indians, in the decades between his 1838 death and the American Civil War, Osceola was perhaps the most talked-about Native American of the day. Towns, counties, schools, hotels, steamboats, cricket clubs, children, and award-winning show livestock were all named after him. Newspapers and magazines published countless poems lamenting the death of the “great Indian chief”—whose “prophetic voice,” for example, “Made every warrior’s heart rejoice”—while those who had met him (or claimed to have met him) could almost guarantee that their descriptions of Osceola’s “savage” but “dignified” air, or his “wildly beautiful” smile, or even his “Grecian nose” would be published in newspapers up and down the east coast.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, after his death, all of his belongings, including his clothes, knife, powder

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<sup>1</sup> For “prophetic voice,” see P. M. H., “Osceola’s Soliloquy,” *The Knickerbocker; Or New York Magazine* (New York), July 1838, pp. 55-57. For descriptions of his presence, see, for example, John W. Simmons,

horn, locks of his hair, etc., were passed around the country as “artifacts,” attracting great attention wherever they travelled. Even his head—his actual, physical head—was surgically removed soon after his death, embalmed, and sent to New York for display in the Surgical and Pathological Museum.<sup>2</sup>

And yet, much like his contemporary, Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), the fame that Osceola (c.1804-1838) received after his death far out-weighed the influence he was able to wield during his lifetime. According to Thomas Woodward, an American soldier who had spent decades with Creeks and Seminoles, “Osceola ... was not a chief,” though many subsequent American commentators had “fallen into” such “an error.”<sup>3</sup> Similarly, another American soldier serving in Florida, noted that Osceola was, at the time of the war, a fairly un-noteworthy “sub-chief,” whose influence had become “very much exaggerated” after the war.<sup>4</sup> So how was it that this “sub-chief,” Osceola, achieved such a prominent place in the antebellum American imagination—and subsequently became one of just two Indians the average Florida State student can name today?

Part of the answer lies in the manner in which he was captured during the Second Seminole War, which was said to have occurred under a “white flag of truce.” The event occurred during the Second Seminole War, a conflict that pitted the United States and their Indian allies against those Seminoles who, like Osceola, opposed the US governments plans for

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“Osceola,” *Cincinnati Mirror, and Western Gazette of Literature, Science, and the Arts*, 27 August 1836, pp. 245-256.

<sup>2</sup> For more on Osceola’s head, see Jared T. Milanich, “Osceola’s Head,” *Archaeology* 57:1 (Jan./Feb., 2004), pp. 48-53.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas S. Woodward, *Woodward’s Reminiscences of the Creek, or Muscogee Indians, Contained in Letters to Friends in Georgia and Alabama* (Tuscaloosa, Ala., 1939 [orig. 1859]), 45.

<sup>4</sup> Woodburne Potter, *The War in Florida, Being an Exposition of Its Causes and an Accurate History of the Campaigns of General Clinch, Gaines, and Scott By an late staff officer* (Baltimore: Lewis and Coleman, 1836), 10-11.

Seminole removal. In October 1837, several years into the conflict, at a time when many Seminoles were running critically low on food and ammunition, General Jesup invited Seminole combatants ready to surrender to come to Fort Marion in St. Augustine. Here they would hear Jesup's "good talk" and would be "assign[ed] a portion" of the allocated Indian lands out West.<sup>5</sup> Several dozen Seminoles accepted the offer, and Osceola, whose health was deteriorating, considered it. Weighing his options, Osceola travelled within several miles of the fort, but did not immediately enter. Upon hearing that some Seminoles might be out on the peripheries of the fort, an exasperated Jesup, fearful that their intention might be to convince recently-surrendered Seminoles to leave the fort, ordered that they be arrested. A dozen armed soldiers were sent to carry out the arrests, and, when they met Osceola in the woods, they took him captive while he waved a white piece of cloth he had been given the previous day.<sup>6</sup>

The event might have passed without much media attention if not for a group of pro-removal Cherokees, headed by John Ross, who were at the fort during Osceola's imprisonment. They had been sent by president Van Buren to persuade Seminoles in Florida that western emigration was their best option. The Cherokee delegation, however, struggled to achieve much of an effect, which they chalked up to a breakdown in trust between themselves and General Jesup. Jesup admitted that he "had no *confidence* in anything the Indians said," while Ross and other Cherokees insisted that Jesup "opposed our mission ... because it was taking [the] affairs of Florida out of [Jesup's] control."<sup>7</sup> In their report back to the president, the Cherokee delegation deemed their efforts in Florida a failure, which they blamed on Jesup's lack of

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<sup>5</sup> Patricia Riles Wickman, *Osceola's Legacy* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1991), 99.

<sup>6</sup> Wickman, 24-35, 101; General T.S. Jesup to Colonel Z. Taylor, *American State Papers*, 27 October 1837; Capt. J.R. Vinton to Gen. T.S. Jesup, *American State Papers*, 22 November 1837.

<sup>7</sup> For Ross quotation, see "Report of the Cherokee Deputation into Florida, Washington City, D. C., Feby. 17th, 1838," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 9, no. 4 (December 1931): 426. For Jesup, quoted in Patricia R. Wickman, *Osceola's Legacy* (Tuscaloosa, 1991), 26.

commitment to peace plans. As a case in point, they pointed to the the American soldiers' recent treatment of Osceola. Jesup, Ross wrote, "was determined ... from the bitterness of his feelings to frustrate every plan" for peace, and "to capture [the remaining Seminoles] no matter what way it should be attempted to be effected, whether under the waving banner of peace or in the open battle field."<sup>8</sup> Unhappy with the state of affairs in Florida, the Cherokees left St. Augustine after a month and a half, and repeated the story Osceola's capture "under the waving banner of peace" to journalists in Charleston who quickly published news of the "Osceola affair," which was soon reprinted in the major American newspapers.<sup>9</sup>

The "Osceola affair" generated a several-month-long print war that played out in the context of partisan debates between Whigs and Democrats. Whigs condemned the capture of Osceola as an example of the "base treachery" at the heart of the Andrew Jackson and now Martin Van Buren presidencies, while Democrats defended the actions of General Jesup, accusing Whigs of being "mock-philanthropists" who only used the story of Osceola as a "pretext for assailing the General Government when every other resource failed them."<sup>10</sup> But as heated as these debates became in the months after Osceola's capture, partisan flare-ups of this sort do not often remain a topic of discussion for very long. And yet the story of Osceola was resurrected multiple times over the next couple of decades, and, indeed remains within the public imagination more than a century and a half later. Part of the reason for that Osceola's story continued to resonate in the American imagination throughout the mid-nineteenth century is that it spoke to contested ideas about American expansion, the contest between "civilization" and

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<sup>8</sup> Ross, "Report of the Cherokee Deputation into Florida," 438.

<sup>9</sup> To give just a few examples, see: *National Gazette* (Philadelphia) 1 November 1837; *Rhode-Island Republican* (Newport, RI) 1 November 1837; *The Sun* (Baltimore) 2 November 1837; *Richmond Enquirer*, 2 November 1837.

<sup>10</sup> *Hampshire Gazette* (Northampton, Mass.), 15 November 1837; *Daily Ohio Statesman* (Columbus), 11 November 1837.

“savagery,” the perceived disappearance of the “Indian race,” and even the abolition of slavery. Still, it would have been very difficult to use Osceola as a useful vehicle for hashing out these debates had it not been for something else. Because Osceola had not been a major figure before the Second Seminole War, and because he died of sickness within months of his capture, Americans had very little factual information about him. Even those Americans who had spent years in Florida, and who had developed an intimate familiarity with many Seminoles, knew only the barest details of his life, most of which they gleaned second- or third-hand. This obscurity, though, is precisely why Americans were able to use him as a proxy for a host of different issues. Essentially, Osceola was a black slate upon which American could graft any number of competing narratives. Osceola’s story had the right combination of intrigue and mystery that allowed politically sensitive aspects of his story to be manipulated and mobilized toward a host of competing ideological ends, ultimately making this one-time “sub-chief” into one of the most talked-about Indians in American history.

Popular writings about Osceola flourished in two periods during the mid-nineteenth century. First in the years immediately following his death—in the late 1830s and early 1840s—during the end of the Second Seminole War, and then again in the 1850s, during the Third Seminole War. In both periods, various sorts of stories about Osceola circulated throughout the United States. Some were firmly-grounded in information received by people who knew him personally or were at least well acquainted with Seminole people generally. Others were wholesale fabrications. But most fell somewhere in the middle: they tended to be creative elaborations on highly selective bits of information, half-truths, and speculations. All of the myths that circulated about Osceola, though, no matter how shaky the evidence upon which they were based, reflected the concerns and anxieties of Americans in that particular historical



moment. As such, the stories told about Osceola could, and did, change depending on the larger discourses of the day.

The first wave of Osceola myth-making in the late 1830s and 1840s began with the newspaper wars mentioned above between Whigs and Democrats. But as the weeks and months passed, and as journalists moved onto the next hot political issues, the stories and poems written about Osceola took on a more uniform character. They still tended to focus on the event of Osceola's capture, and they all took a position similar to the one already laid out by Whig partisans, expressing some form of outrage and/or regret over the duplicity involved in Osceola's capture. As the heated partisan politics surrounding the event passed, and as the Seminole War wound down, Americans of all political persuasions latched onto this more sympathetic telling of Osceola's story. Following the high-point of Indian removal in the 1830s, white Americans began to use the story primarily in two ways. First, Osceola came to be thought of as the last of the authentically "Indian" Seminoles, who had fought valiantly against the forces of American civilization, but whose cause, though noble, was ultimately doomed to failure. He was, in other words, the most recent face attached to the image of the "vanishing Indian," a trope within which the death of Indians as a "race" was inevitable, if perhaps regrettable.<sup>11</sup> Second, Osceola's capture came to be seen as the leading negative example of how orderly and "civilized" American expansion was supposed to take place. Even if most white Americans agreed that the "savage" Indians were "now passing away from the earth," many also believed, at least in theory, that the inevitable advance of civilization and American expansion ought to occur in a fashion as

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<sup>11</sup> For more on the "vanishing Indian" trope, see, for example, Brian W. Dippie, *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1982); Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890* (New York: Atheneum, 1995); Jean M. O'Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

civilized as its larger goals.<sup>12</sup> The “shameful” capture of Osceola came to be seen as a black mark on the nation’s honor and was hoisted up as an example of the uncivilized mechanisms of expansion that should to be avoided at all costs if civilization was to advance properly.

The second period during which writings about Osceola flourished came during the 1850s, when his story was resurrected and rearticulated to fit the most recent and pressing debates of the day. This time the question was slavery and its future in the United States. In this context, the discourses about him once more became highly partisan, and were now deployed most forcefully by northern abolitionists in their ideological war against the slave-holding South. Within this set of debates, white Americans drew on different aspects of Osceola’s story and added new elements to the myth. Osceola’s capture was still used as a critique of General Jesup’s tactics, but rather than view Jesup as an exemplar of the Democratic Party’s deceitfulness—as Whigs in the 1830s had done—abolitionists in the 1850s used Jesup as a stand-in for the evil practices of the southern states generally. More important still was a shift in focus away from Osceola’s capture and to the very beginnings of the Second Seminole War. Recognizing that a number of runaway slaves had been living among the Seminoles in Florida at the time of the conflict, northern abolitionists began to argue that the war, at its core, was an effort by southern states to capture runaways, to eliminate the Indians who offered them a haven, and, more broadly, to ensure that the whole of Florida was fit for large-scale slave plantations. Because information about Osceola was especially fuzzy for the period before his capture, abolitionists retroactively gave Osceola a black wife, and positioned him as a warrior who not only fought against removal from his homeland but also waged war against the institution of slavery.

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<sup>12</sup> “The Wife and Child of Osceola,” *Holdens Dollar Magazine of Criticisms, Biographies, Sketches, Essays, Tales, Reviews, Poetry, etc., etc.* (New York), October 1850, pp. 591-592.

Much, of course, has continued to be written about Osceola in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Popular accounts, of which there are many, tend to rehash (and rearticulate) many of the myths produced about Osceola in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup> Academic accounts, meanwhile, have been far more interested in separating what slim facts we do know about Osceola's life from the popular stories that were later told about him.<sup>14</sup> The questions that concern me here fall somewhere in between these two focuses. While I am certainly interested in separating fact from fiction, my focus is primarily on engaging the latter. Of all of the ways Osceola's story could have been told, why did the myths constructed about him take the particular shape they did? Why were particular bits of information known about him selected rather than others? How did the stories told about Osceola change in the decades following his death? And in what ways do the particular contours of these myths help us understand the intellectual landscape inhabited by the people who expressed them? Before moving into the myth-making processes, however, it will be useful to lay out first what we know about Osceola, the man.

As a brief sketch, we know from first-hand accounts that Osceola was born in the Creek town of Tallassee and went by the name Billy Powell. He was given this name after his father, William Powell, a Scottish trader living among the Creeks. His mother was a Creek woman of mixed heritage who fled to Florida with her brother and young Billy to Florida after the Red

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Thom Hatch, *Osceola and the Great Seminole War: A Struggle for Justice and Freedom* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2012); Lerone Bennett, Jr., "Red and the Black: The Indians and the Africans," *Ebony* (Dec. 1970), pp. 70-80.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Patricia R. Wickman, *Osceola's Legacy* (Tuscaloosa, 1991); Charles H. Coe, "The Parentage and Birthplace of Osceola," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 17:4 (April, 1939), 304-311; Kenneth W. Porter, "The Episode of Osceola's Wife: Fact or Fiction?" *Florida Historical Quarterly* 26:1 (July 1947), pp. 92-98; *Florida Historical Quarterly* 33:3/4, Osceola Double Number (Jan.-Apr. 1955); William C. Sturtevant, "Osceola's Coats?" *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 34:4 (April, 1956), pp. 315-328; Jared T. Milanich, "Osceola's Head," *Archaeology* 57:1 (Jan./Feb., 2004), pp. 48-53.

Stick War in 1814. Like many others from Creek towns that had fought against the United States during the war, they immigrated to Florida as refugees seeking to establish themselves within Seminole society. The Seminoles were a mixture of Muscogee, Mikasuki, and English speakers. Most could speak at least a version of all three, and almost everyone came from mixed lineages that included some combination of Muscogee, Mikasuki, Hitchitee, Uchee, Anglo, Hispanic, and African descent. Within such an ethnically and linguistically flexible situation, it likely would not have taken long for Billy's family, as Muscogee speakers, to integrate themselves into local networks in Florida.

Though born as Billy Powell, the name Osceola was a title conferred to him upon the attainment of manhood, and the name gives us some indication of Osceola's position in Seminole society before the Second Seminole War. Although many Americans hailed him as the greatest ever Seminole chief, he never actually had the status of *mico* (or headman) during his lifetime. The name Osceola, or Asi-Yaholo, literally means "black drink" (*asi*) "singer" (*yaholo*), and, as Mark F. Boyd points out, it is the title given to the person who performs the "long drawn-out cry" while serving the caffeinated beverage known as Black Drink at the annual Green Corn ceremony.<sup>15</sup> While Osceola's role in this ritual performance is by no means something to scoff at—important matters could not be discussed until everyone had had their share of Black Drink—it is also a position that carried little political authority. Still, by the beginning of the Second Seminole War, Osceola had obtained another title with a greater degree of responsibility attached to it. Though he continued to be called Osceola, his new ceremonial name was Tallassee Tustenuggee, which referred to his status as "warrior" (*tustenuggee*) and to his place of birth (Tallassee). The title implies a position of leadership greater than the average member of a war

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<sup>15</sup> Mark F. Boyd, "Asi-Yaholo or Osceola," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 33:3/4, Osceola Double Number (Jan.-Apr. 1955), pp. 251.

party, but also a subordinate position to the local town's "mico," or headman, who, in Osceola's case was man who went by the name Francis.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to his name and title, we know some of the events Osceola was involved as Seminoles debated the removal question amongst themselves, and as anti-removal Seminoles fought against the United States. During the 1830s, as Creeks, Cherokees, and other Indians in the Old Southwest were removed, Seminoles went through their own debates about removal. Judging by his actions, Osceola, whose family was from a Creek town previously devastated by American troops, remained in the anti-removal faction throughout the 1830s. He was part of a war party that killed Charlie Emathla, a pro-emigration Seminole, who had agreed to removal plans during the Treaty of Payne's Landing without conferring with other leading Seminoles. Osceola was also part of a war party that killed Indian agent Wiley Thompson in December 1835. The same day that Osceola and other Seminoles killed Thompson, another, much larger war party had gone to an American camp near present-day Tampa, and killed more than one hundred U.S. soldiers, in what came to be called the Dade Massacre. These two simultaneous attacks stoked anti-Seminole sentiment among Americans, and greatly escalated U.S. involvement in Florida. Although Osceola was not the leader in the murder of Charlie Emathla nor the attack on Wiley Thompson, he played enough of a role in both that he became, along with five or six others, a known anti-removal figure to Americans close to the situation in Florida.

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<sup>16</sup> Myer M. Cohen, *Notices of Florida and the Campaigns* (Charleston, S.C.: Burges & Honour, 1836), 65, 233-39; James W. Simmons, "Recollections of the Late Campaign in East Florida," *Atkinson's Casket* 11 (November 1836), 542-559; Thomas S. Woodward, *Woodward's Reminiscences of the Creek, or Muscogee Indians, Contained in Letters to Friends in Georgia and Alabama* (1859; Reprint: Tuscaloosa, 1939), 45.

Osceola's infamous capture occurred in November 1837. A year before that, a year before Osceola became a household name, it was not unusual to read anti-removal, anti-Jackson, commentaries on the Florida War like the one published in the *Hampshire Gazette* in November 1836: "It makes the blood boil in the veins of every true son of the pilgrims, when he thinks of the oppression that has been heaped upon the defenceless Indians." After running through the various ways in which this oppression of Indians manifested itself, the author asked, "But who is responsible for all this oppression? Is it not the present administration?"<sup>17</sup> It wasn't an especially subtle rhetorical question, but at this point, by the end of Andrew Jackson's second term, partisan debates over Indian removal, which had raged for years, had perhaps lost a bit in the way nuance. For those living far from any frontier violence, you could even get away with arguing not simply against Indian removal but even claim to be hoping *for* an Indian victory. As one Bostonian wrote, "as for the squatters" now living in Florida, "we care not if the Indians cut them like gourds—They have chosen their game, deposited their stakes and ought to stand the hazard of the die."<sup>18</sup>

Expressions of disdain for frontier families in Florida might feel somewhat strange given that the threat of frontier violence in northern and central Florida was very much alive. The Dade Massacre, which had killed over one hundred Americans in Florida just eleven months prior, was still rather fresh in many people's minds, and the Second Seminole War, now in its second year, was regularly causing more casualties. Although such comments were almost certainly intended more for dramatic effect than genuine ill-will toward Floridians, they still speak to the intense partisanship between anti-expansion Whigs, especially in the North, and Democrats, who had

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<sup>17</sup> *Hampshire Gazette* (Northampton, Mass), 23 November 1836.

<sup>18</sup> *The Torch Light & Public Advertiser* (Hagers-Town, Md.) 29 December 1836; *Boston Courier*, 7 November 1836.

just gotten their candidate, Martin Van Buren, elected president. Van Buren had also served as vice president to Andrew Jackson, and Whigs feared four more years of expensive wars in the South and West.

By the following year, with Americans dealing with the Panic of 1837, and the war in Florida having now become the most expensive war in U.S. history to that point, everyone—Whigs and Democrats alike—seemed to look for a peaceful end to the conflict. Moreover, with the conflict having taken hundreds more lives to famine and warfare, it no longer seemed appropriate for Whigs to talk lightly about Indians “cut[ting Americans] up like gourds.”<sup>19</sup> So when news came in that Osceola and other high-profile “hostile” Seminoles surrendered in late-October 1837, the news was met with near-universal celebration in the American press. There were still differences in terms of how various sides interpreted the event, with newspapers in support of the Democratic administration valorizing the heroism of American soldiers while Whig publications expressed relief that this protracted, ill-advised war might finally be coming to an end.<sup>20</sup> But everyone agreed that a peaceful end to the conflict such as this was a positive outcome for all parties involved.

The problem was that this was not the end of the war. The fact that several dozen Seminoles were now in St. Augustine negotiating plans for their own westward migration still

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<sup>19</sup> For dollar figure at the time, see *Albany Evening Journal*, 15 September 1837 and *Albany Evening Journal*, 30 January 1838. The war was not yet over, however, and ended up, on the American side, resulting in the death 1,500 soldiers and costing roughly \$40,000,000, making it the most expensive “Indian War” in US history and, when measured as a percent of GDP, one the most expensive wars ever fought by the US. See John K. Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War* (Gainesville, Fla.: University of Florida Press, 1967), 321, 323, 325; and John and Mary Lou Missall, *The Seminole Wars: America’s Longest Indian Conflict* (Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, 2004), 177, 204-205.

<sup>20</sup> For Democratic side, see, e.g., *Daily Ohio Statesman* (Columbus) 11 November 1837; *Army and Navy Chronicle* 7 November 1837. For the Whig side, see, e.g., *Connecticut Herald* (New Haven) 7 November 1837; *Hampshire Gazette* (Northampton, Mass), 15 November 1837; *Albany Evening Journal*, 8 December 1837.

meant that there were hundreds more Seminoles in Florida who refused to leave. Nor was the ideological press war finished. Cherokees who had been sent to negotiate with the Seminoles soon brought news that Osceola's peaceful "surrender" had instead been a forceful capture that took place under a "white flag of truce." In the American media, there were several different types of response to the allegations against the U.S. military's handling of Osceola. There was, of course, the expected break along partisan lines—with Whigs and Democrats diametrically opposed—but there was also a less partisan interpretation of the Osceola affair that offered a synthesis of the Whig/Democrat divide. It was this synthesis that, throughout the following decade, proved to be the most influential interpretation once the most vocal of the political ideologues had moved onto other issues.

To begin with how the Osceola affair initially played out among hardline Whigs and Democrats, we will look at a couple of examples. Most publications critical of the Democratic administration argued that Jesup's "treachery" was "a severe disgrace on our arms," and that "however desirable the object to be obtained, treachery, even to a savage, cannot be justified."<sup>21</sup> Variation on this theme of unjustness also existed among Whigs. Some argued that although Osceola's capture was indeed a "humiliating" example of "the most unjustifiable treachery," at the end of the day, "the capture of these chiefs" might nevertheless "tend to important results [sic]."<sup>22</sup> Others, though, sought to use Osceola as a broader condemnation of the goals of the war generally: "this ... act of base treachery which we have recently witnessed [provides] added evidence of the white man's perfidy to the sons of the forest," especially since, they argued, the purpose of the war was nothing other than an attempt "to gratify the cupidity of a few of the

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<sup>21</sup> Connecticut Herald (New Haven) 7 November 1837.

<sup>22</sup> Hampshire Gazette (Northampton, Mass.) 8 November 1837.



Southern States.”<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile, supporters of the Democratic program argued that, although Jesup may have been guilty of a few instances of duplicity, the “treachery and cruelty” of the Seminoles over the past several years far outweighed anything the American soldiers had done. They also poked fun at the “fresh bottle of crocodile tears” that “mock-philanthropists ... uncorked for the poor Seminoles,” and they stressed that the “press who are now doling out sickly lamentations over the downfall of the *poor, persecuted, betrayed* Indians” did so only as a “pretext for assailing the General Government when every other resource failed them.”<sup>24</sup>

As heated and personal as debates became in this proxy print war, the less partisan positions tended to veer somewhere in between of these two opposing interpretations. This middle ground blended together the sentimental language deployed by Whigs with a rationalization of Jesup’s tactics on the grounds that “any plan by which the war can be terminated” was a plan worth pursuing, as it would bring peace “to bleeding and suffering Florida,” and would allow “the beguiled savage [to be] transferred to a quieter homestead.”<sup>25</sup> In one example a Baltimore journalist, noted that it was Jesup’s treatment of Osceola was a terrible “black mark” on the history of American expansion. He positioned himself as a “friend of the Aborigines,” who did not like to see the “poor” Seminoles treated in such a terrible way. Osceola, in this story, had put up a strong fight for a noble cause, and yet, “when the ultimate annihilation of the Seminoles is admitted, no true friend to the wronged Aborigines can condemn” the relative peace that resulted.<sup>26</sup> In this way the author could valorize Osceola, regret his and the Seminoles’ decline, and express a stoic resignation about the “inevitable” fate of

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<sup>23</sup> Hampshire Gazette, 15 November 1837.

<sup>24</sup> Daily Ohio Statesman (Columbus) 11 November 1837. For a similar example, see The Floridian (Tallahassee) 1 November 1837.

<sup>25</sup> Baltimore Chronicle, 16 November 1837.

<sup>26</sup> Baltimore Chronicle, 16 November 1837.

Indians. This mixture of “noble savage” and “vanishing Indian” tropes could be expressed explicitly, as they were here, but they were also internalized to an extent that they could be expressed in far more subtle ways as well. As one New Yorker wrote in a brief report about his time in St. Augustine, Florida, where he planned to move in a few months:

I have shaken hands with Oseola. He has a fine person and countenance, and is one of the noblest specimens of manhood. Our orange and mulberry groves are thriving and promising, and once the war be over, East Florida would rapidly fill up with northerners—many are moving in.<sup>27</sup>

As with the previous example, the partisan language of “treachery” and “duplicity” was extracted, and what remained was the “fact” of American expansion and the inevitable decline of the noble savage.

This combination of “vanishing Indian” and “noble savage” allowed Osceola to become a hero-figure for Americans of all stripes in the 1840s, at least for those living outside of Florida. In the northeastern U.S., Osceola became a staple for romantic poets seeking themes with built-in resonance. Poems like “Osceola’s Soliloquy,” “Osceola: Dirge of the Indian Brave,” “Lament for Osceola,” “Osceola: A Death Song,” and countless others were printed in newspapers and literary magazines throughout the decade. Also in the North, cricket teams, schooners, and show livestock took the name Osceola.<sup>28</sup> Although it may seem that references to Osceola were meant,

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<sup>27</sup> Albany Evening Journal, 8 December 1837.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Leslie, “Osceola: Dirge of the Indian Braves,” *The Ladies’ Companion, a Monthly Magazine* (New York), March 1838, p. 236; John Pierpont, “The Tocsin,” in *The Anti-Slavery Poems of John Pierpont* (Boston: Oliver Johnson, 1843), pp. 15-20; Theta, “Osceola,” *The American Monthly Magazine* (New York), June 1838, p. 525; James Henry Carleton, “The Death of Osceola,” *The Gentleman’s Magazine* (Philadelphia), May 1838, p. 326; P. M. H., “Osceola’s Soliloquy,” *The Knickerbocker; Or New York Magazine* (New York), July 1838, pp. 55-57; “Osceola: A Death Song,” *Southern Literary Messenger* (Richmond), November 1841, 797; A. W. Holden, “Lament for Osceola,” *The Rural Repository Devoted to Polite Literature, Such as Moral and Sentimental Tales, Original Communications, Biography, Traveling Sketches, Poetry, Amusing Miscellany, Humorous and Historical Anecdotes* (Hudson, NY), 10 April 1841, 176; Thomas W. Storrow, “Osceola, the Seminole War-Chief,” *Knickerbocker Magazine* 24 (November 1844), 447-48; “The Home of Osceola—The Lagoon of Florida,” *Massachusetts Ploughman and New England Journal of Agriculture* (Boston), 16 May 1846, p.

as they had been initially used by Whigs, to critique American expansion, that context was almost completely erased by the end of the Second Seminole War. While poets extolled the virtues of Osceola, they were essentially expressions of melancholy about the inevitability of Indian decline and had no anti-expansionary sentiment. Most of the ships named Osceola were, moreover, used in whaling expeditions that played a role in American imperialism in the Pacific.<sup>29</sup>

That these ships were used for the purpose of American expansion was shared by frontiersmen in the West. Frontier settlements throughout Western territories (and soon-to-be states) had towns and counties named after Osceola during the early 1840s, as was the case in Arkansas, Iowa, Indiana, Minnesota, Missouri, Texas, and Wisconsin, and others. In Michigan, which had recently gained statehood in 1837, people in the Unwattin County—named for an Ottawa leader who had lived in the region during the previous generation—decided to rename the country Osceola in 1843. For those most invested in the story of Osceola during the 1840s, his story had nothing to do with anti-removal or anti-expansionary sentiments. Rather, especially in frontier regions, the story of Osceola was meant to serve as the negative example against which civilized American expansion should take place. The story of Osceola was used, in effect, though not necessarily purposefully, to give a higher moral ground to those engaged in American expansion elsewhere.

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4; William H. C. Hosmer, "Osceola's Address to His Warriors," *Graham's American Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art, and Fashion* (Philadelphia), July 1852, p. 12. Even Walt Whitman, decades later, continued this tradition of poetry writing about Osceola: Walt Whitman, "Osceola," *Munyon's Illustrated World* (April 1890). On the Whitman poem, see Kathryn Walkiewicz, "Portraits and Politics: The Specter of Osceola in *Leaves of Grass*," *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 25:3 (2008), 108-115.

<sup>29</sup> See references to ships named "Osceola" and "Seminole" in Nancy Shoemaker, *Native American Whalers and the World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

This version of Osceola's story, which both valorized Osceola and used him as a means of justifying American expansion, remained the dominate narrative of Osceola throughout the 1840s. This changed, however, during the early 1850s, as Osceola's story once more, as it had in the 1830s, took a strikingly partisan tone. For one, the prospect of yet another Seminole War (the Third Seminole War) threatened to engulf Florida in the early 1850s, and as newspapers and magazines published remembrances of the Second Seminole War, they began to bring Osceola's name into the national consciousness once more. But the stories that many recounted about Osceola in the 1850s bore only tangential resemblance to those told about him in the 1830s. This was especially true in the North, where Osceola's story was reformulated in ways that integrated it into the most divisive ideological issue of the day: slavery.

The relationship between Seminoles and African Americans almost never arose in discussions about Osceola during the 1830s. Back then, Indian removal provided the contextual backdrop for that myths produced about Osceola, and, generally speaking, it was in the interest of both white Americans and Native Americans to downplay the closeness of ties between blacks and Indians.<sup>30</sup> As unrelated as Osceola's story may have seemed to readers in the 1830s, northern abolitionists were able put together a narrative of Osceola's that proved a rather powerful one for northern readers in the 1850s. Most of the elements in abolitionist stories about Osceola were wholesale fabrications, but that does mean that they were less powerful for it. Northern writers used the information that was commonly known about Osceola and skillfully filled in the large gaps to create a full backstory that was both believable and that would resonate with the anti-slavery cause.

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<sup>30</sup> See, e.g., Kathleen DuVal, "Debating Identity, Sovereignty, and Civilization: The Arkansas Valley after the Louisiana Purchase," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 26:1 (2006), 25-58; Tiya Miles, *Ties That Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom* (Berkeley, 2005); Claudio Saunt, *Black, White, and Indian: Race and the Unmaking of an American Family* (New York, 2005).

As an example of this, we will examine a passage from William Goodell's *Slavery and Anti-Slavery*, published in 1852, in which he recounts the causes of the Second Seminole War and Osceola's place in it.

Florida was ... destined to the theatre of a pro-slavery war, prosecuted by the government of the United States. The Seminole Indians inhabited the marshy portions of the that country. Fugitive slaves took refuge with them, and sometimes intermarried among them. Osceola, one of their chiefs, became the hero of a painfully interesting tragedy, illustrative of this condition of things.

Osceola, or Powell, as he was called by the whites, had a wife to whom he was much attached, whose mother was a mullatto, who ran away, was adopted by the Indians, and married one of their chiefs. Osceola's wife was seized as a slave by a person claiming her under the right of her MOTHER'S FORMER MASTER! The high spirited husband attempted to defend her, but was overpowered, and put in irons by [General Wiley] Thompson, who commanded the party. This transaction has been said to be the origin of the war in Florida....

The cost to the United States of this long protracted slave hunt (for it was nothing else), has been estimated at forty millions of dollars. "What has the North to do with slavery?"

In this war, the American flag was disgraced by the importation of blood-hounds from Cuba, and the employment of them in hunting down the Indians, by advice and under the direction of General Zachary Taylor, who services in the Seminole and Mexican wars—both for the benefit of slavery—were rewarded with the Presidency of the United States.<sup>31</sup>

Goodell's passage is interesting in several ways, but it is especially instructive here because it highlights several themes common to abolitionist writings about Osceola and the Seminole War. First is the idea that the Seminole War was about a fight over slavery and slavery alone. Here,

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<sup>31</sup> William Goodell, *Slavery and Anti-Slavery: A History of the Great Struggle in Both Hemispheres; With a View of the Slavery Question in the United States* (New York: William Harned, 1852).

Goodell describes Florida as having been the “theatre of a pro-slavery war,” and later refers to the Seminole War as “nothing else” than a “long protracted slave hunt.” Second, to bring the most recognizable Seminole into the story, Osceola is often said to have had a wife of African descent (Goodell says she was the daughter of a “mullatto” ex-slave but most sources describe her simply as an “African” woman) who was captured and enslaved by a man who claimed to have been her mother’s master. Osceola, after trying but failing to rescue her by himself, was imprisoned, thus beginning the Second Seminole War.

Before we explore these two elements of abolitionist myths about Osceola, it is important first to notice the shift in focus between the two periods. In the 1830s, the focus with respect to Osceola was on his capture at the end of the war. This moment, and attendant accusations of duplicity, was used by Whigs who opposed the U.S.’s costly wars by raising concern over a potential moral breakdown in the nation as a result of “uncivilized” methods of expansion. For abolitionists, though, the narrative of the war was that it was a war over slavery, and so the circumstances of Osceola’s had little resonance for their cause. Still, since the story of his capture had made Osceola a person that many Americans, especially in the North, had a great deal of sympathy for, abolitionists saw an opportunity to bring these sorts of people to the abolitionist cause by creating a backstory for him that showed him less as a victim of U.S. expansion but as a victim of southern slavery. They did so by focusing not on the end of the war, but on its causes, which they said was for the support of slavery. In addition to opening up new lands for slave plantations, abolitionists argued that the war had been a means of acquiring new slaves by capturing black people living among the Seminoles (like Osceola’s wife) or, similarly, that it was carried out to eliminate the potential for runaway slaves to seek refuge among the Seminoles.

The story that Osceola had a black wife was an especially compelling in the late 1840s and early 1850s because of debates over the Fugitive Slave Laws, which were passed in 1850. During the Polk presidency (1845-1849), debates over American expansion caused an intensification of divides between North and South over the question of slavery. The divisiveness between southern slave-holding interests and northern “free-soilers” led to the Compromise of 1850. Part of this Compromise included the highly controversial Fugitive Slave Act, which required that all escaped slaves, upon capture, be returned to their masters, and required that every citizen of a free state must comply with the new law. According to the Act, law enforcement officers in free states were liable to fines of \$1,000 (roughly \$28,000 in present-day terms) if they failed “to obey and execute all warrants” concerning alleged runaway slaves. Moreover, any citizen caught helping runaways escape also faced fines or, alternatively, jail sentences of up to six months.<sup>32</sup>

With the passing of the Fugitive Slave Law, anti-slavery sympathizers in free states argued that good, decent citizens in the North opposed to slavery were now being forced to participate in its enforcement. In this, they found common cause with Seminoles who had, in the 1820s and 1830s been in disputes with the United States over the return of slaves who had escaped southern plantations and were living among the Seminoles in Florida.<sup>33</sup> Fugitive slaves had been forming maroon communities in Florida or living in Seminole towns since the eighteenth century. But as Claudio Saunt reminds us, Seminoles who welcomed fugitives “were not waging a war of liberation” and “did not share the liberal ideology of emancipationists.”<sup>34</sup> It

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<sup>32</sup> [ copy of the law, found at <http://www.nationalcenter.org/FugitiveSlaveAct.html> ]

<sup>33</sup> Rodriguez, *Slavery in the United States: A Social, Political, and Historical Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara, 2007), 446; Covington, *The Seminoles of Florida* (Gainesville, 1993); John and Mary Missall, *The Seminoles of Wars* (Gainesville, 2004).

<sup>34</sup> Claudio Saunt, *A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the Creek Indians, 1733-1816* (Cambridge, U.K., 1999).

was in Seminole interests, though, to assimilate runaways and to build military alliances with autonomous maroon communities in the area. Some African Americans who sought refuge among the Seminoles could become full members of Seminole society. But relations between blacks and Seminoles—who, like their Creek neighbors, practiced racial slavery—were always imperfect and often unequal.<sup>35</sup> During times of food shortages, for example, African Americans were the first to go without and suffered the most. An American officer in St. Augustine noted in 1838 that when Osceola called for his family after he was captured, they were assisted by “a fine looking young warrior ... at the head of the train,” while “the negro part of the train was a wretched picture of squalid misery” and appeared to “have been nearly starved.”<sup>36</sup>

Despite the complicated nature of African-Seminole relations, abolitionists offered a harmonious narrative of Seminole dealings with runaway slaves. The prominent anti-slavery advocate Joshua Reed Giddings, in his 1858 history of “crimes committed by our government against the maroons [of Florida],” even claimed that Osceola was one of the great abolitionists of the day. “He [Osceola] hated slavery, and those who practiced the holding of slaves, with a bitterness that is but little understood by those who have never witnessed its revolting crimes.” Giddings then went on to recount the then-familiar story of how “the wife of Osceola wife was seized as a slave.... Evidently having negro blood in her veins, the law pronounced her a slave; and, as no other person could show title to her, the pirate who had got possession of her body, was supposed of course to be her owner.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Matthew J. Calvin, *Aiming for Pensacola: Fugitive Slaves on the Atlantic and Southern Frontiers* (Cambridge, Mass., 2015), 38

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Wickman, *Osceola's Legacy*, p. 101.

<sup>37</sup> Joshua R. Giddings, *Exiles of Florida: Or, The Crimes Committed by Our Government against the Maroons, Who Fled from South Carolina and other Slaver States, Seeking Protection under Spanish Law* (Columbus, Ohio, 1858), 98.



The story of Osceola's wife, that she was of African descent and was captured by a slave-catching "pirates," was a useful tool for abolitionists. First, the story would have had strong resonance with those outraged about the Fugitive Slave Act. Osceola's and his wife offered an extreme example of the personal tragedies that occur when "fugitives" (or the children of fugitives) are captured and returned to their southern masters. Moreover, the story presented a strong causal link between the issue of slavery and the Second Seminole War, a conflict that most northerners would already have had negative feelings about. Indeed, the story of Osceola and his wife was a common referred to in anti-slavery speeches of the time.<sup>38</sup> The story even spread to England where anti-slavery advocate, Daniel O'Connell, speaking to a crowd in London of the "hideous breeders of human beings for slavery" (i.e. "the American States") across the pond, repeated the story of Osceola's wife and compared Osceola to Napoleon. The audience, for their part, seemed to know the story well already, for when O'Connell began speaking of "the head of the Florida tribes ... whose Indian name I forget," several people in the crowd called out "Oceola."<sup>39</sup>

Stories about Osceola, told in support of anti-slavery positions, also made it outside the world of stump speeches and into that of high politics. When the issue of whether to permit slavery in California was under debate in Congress in 1850, two different speeches to the House of Representatives referenced the story of Osceola's wife. In one, a speaker from Wisconsin, Charles Durkee, mocked another senator who had argued that greater northern compromise over slavery was needed to preserve the cohesion of the republic "in all its greatness and magnanimity." Durkee responded by suggesting that in order "to see more clearly this greatness

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<sup>38</sup> See, e.g., *The Liberator* (Boston, Mass.) 21 September 1849, 3 March 1850; 15 October 1850.

<sup>39</sup> Transcript from a speech given "at a public meeting of anti-slavery Delegates from all parts of the United Kingdom," printed in *The Liberator* (Boston, Mass.), 7 September 1849.

and magnanimity,” the senator ought to “call to mind the case ... of Osceola, once already referred to, who fought against slavery in defense of his wife, his children, and his countrymen ... in the slave-supporting Florida war.” If this be the ‘greatness and magnanimity’ asked for,” he continued, “I pray that our country be less distinguished for such qualities hereafter.”<sup>40</sup>

But even if abolitionist stories about Osceola made useful propaganda, their effectiveness has little to say about their truthfulness. Getting at the truth of a matter is not, of course, the primary purpose of propaganda. Cobbling together partial-truths into narratives that are neat, resonant, and believable, typically is though. It may not come as a surprise, then, that there are few verifiable facts in the stories abolitionists told about Osceola. The idea that he was an ideologically committed abolitionist, for example, as Giddings and later authors suggested, was most certainly a fabrication. He lived in a society that practiced racial slavery, and there is no evidence that he ever opposed it.<sup>41</sup> But on the other hand, there is nothing to suggest, for instance, that Osceola ever himself owned slaves, nor is there much else that, from the perspective of someone in, say, 1850 Boston, would make the story of “Osceola, Liberator of Slaves” seem outside the realm of possibility.

A more interesting example of this, though, is the story of Osceola’s wife. Based on most accounts written at the time, Osceola had two wives, neither of whom was described as black.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *The Daily Globe* (Washington, D.C.), 26 July 1850.

<sup>41</sup> Seminoles, at the beginning of the Second Seminole War, were estimated to have between two hundred and four hundred slaves. John K. Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War* (Gainesville, Fla.: University of Florida Press, 1967); and John and Mary Lou Missall, *The Seminole Wars: America’s Longest Indian Conflict* (Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, 2004). A legal debate concerning payments for the number of Seminole slaves taken by Creeks during the war can be found in *Daily Globe* (Washington, D.C., 21 February 1852).

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, M. M. Cohen, *Notices of Florida and the Campaigns* (Gainesville, 1964), 237; and Thomas W. Storrow, “Osceola, The Seminole War-Chief,” *Knickerbocker Magazine*, 24 (Nov. 1844), 443. Both of these accounts say that Osceola had two wives and two children join him St. Augustine when he was imprisoned there.

This is not to suggest, though, that neither of these women were of African descent. Although recent studies suggest that miscegenation between Seminoles and African Americans in Florida were not especially common, intermarriages most certainly did occur, especially among leadership circles. Chief King Philip, for example was the father of a Black Seminole,<sup>43</sup> and one of the most famous Black Seminole leaders, Abraham, was married the widow of a former Seminole leader.<sup>44</sup> But we know this because both Seminoles and American observers were quick to note the race of those they described. And while this does not mean that one or both of his wives had some degree of African lineage, neither Osceola nor the white Americans who knew him ever described them as such. Moreover, regardless of lineage, both of these women were present in St. Augustine, having come from following his imprisonment in 1837, two years after his wife was supposed to have been seized by slave catchers.

Although we can confidently conclude that the story abolitionists circulated about Osceola's wife had no factual basis, we can not be so certain about where it came from. Among those who discussed in print the fictitious capture in the late 1840s and 1850s, only one author provided a reference. In *The Exiles of Florida* (1858), Joshua Giddings provided what had become the standard account of the story, and pointed to a source that was actually published during Osceola's lifetime. The reference was to the the July 1837 edition of *The Quarterly Anti-Slavery Magazine*. In a piece called "The Political Support for Slavery," the author makes passing reference to a "poor wife of a brave Indian chieftan." The context does not make it clear whether he was referring specifically to Osceola's wife, to someone else's wife, or if, more likely, he was expressing regret over, as he put it, "the decline of the noble tribes" in the face of

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<sup>43</sup> Refers to a person of African descent who was considered fully Seminole (which differentiated them from black Seminole slaves).

<sup>44</sup> Anthony E. Dixon, "Black Seminole Involvement and Leadership during the Second Seminole War, 1835-1842," (Ph.D. Diss., Indiana University, 2007), 38; [ Rivers, *Slavery in Florida*, 198.]

American expansion. Whatever he meant, the editor—who, on several other occasions in the article, made his opinions known on the topic at hand—added his own note at the end of the sentence. There, he took the opportunity to tell his readers the sad tale of Osceola's wife, which—although it would remain dormant until it began to circulate again during the Fugitive Slave Law controversies—the story the editor laid out was almost identical to the one that became so well-known fifteen years later. In some cases, it is almost verbatim. Though the passage had been buried deep in an obscure journal edition, once resurrected, it gained a much greater degree of resonance with readers in the new political climate. So where did the editor of the 1837 journal hear about the tragedy of Osceola's wife? He writes in the note that he had heard it from M. M. Cohen, the author of *Notices of Florida*, which was then and continues to be one of the most highly-regarded sources on the Second Seminole War. The problem for the story told by the editor, though, is that there is nothing in M. M. Cohen's works that suggest anything remotely close to the story contained in the , and Cohen in fact contradicts several of the main claims of the editor's story about Osceola's wife.<sup>45</sup>

But once again, even though we must admit that Osceola never had a black wife who was seized and returned to slavery, the story was by no means outside the realm of possibility. Seminoles did marry African Americans and, even if they were born outside of slavery, the children of enslaved women were legally considered slaves regardless of how long they had lived free lives in Florida. Moreover, during the Second Seminole War, officers were urged to locate and return runaway slaves living among the Seminoles, and, on several occasions, Black Seminoles were seized with no legal right whatsoever. To cite just one example, a group of white Georgians, taking advantage of the turmoil in Florida on the eve of the war, descended on the

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<sup>45</sup> [ add Cohen source ] Moreover, most of the main elements of the journal editor's story are contradicted by what Cohen wrote about Osceola.

settlement of Econchattemicco, There they seized all the “Negroes and half Negroes” they found living there, including Econchattemicco’s “Granddaughter (half Negro),” who, along with the rest was “stolen and carried away” for sale in Georgia.<sup>46</sup> With verified stories such as this coming out of Florida it is perhaps not surprising that they might be attributed to the one Seminole Indian that everyone from Maine to Missouri would recognize.

The popular American myths created about Osceola in the mid-nineteenth century have proved enduring in our popular imagination today. According to a Florida Almanac sitting on my shelf, for example—admittedly, this is not the best source of accurate historical information—the Second Seminole war began when Osceola murdered General Wiley Thompson after “U.S. soldiers ... captured Osceola’s wife, contending she was a fugitive slave.” The story of Osceola’s wife has also been repeated in academic histories, including J. Leitch Wright’s *Creeks & Seminoles*, though thankfully he does not follow such sources closely enough as to suggest that the her capture and Osceola’s subsequent response were the primary causes of the Second Seminole War.<sup>47</sup> These and similar examples of sloppily reporting as fact a fabricated anecdote is by no means the worst sin one can commit. The problem with such fabrications persisting well over a century and a half after they were created lies not necessarily with the specific stories themselves but in how the larger narratives around them are framed.

For example, when the Osceola exhibit at the Smithsonian says that Osceola was a staunch opponent of southern slavery, they are telling a distinctly American story of Osceola. This narrative is of course an uplifting one to modern sensibilities—Indians and Africans, two minority groups, working in solidarity to defeat their white oppressors. But such a telling also

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<sup>46</sup> Kenneth W. Porter, “Osceola and the Negroes,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 33:3/4, Osceola Double Number (Jan.-Apr. 1955), pp. 235-239.

<sup>47</sup> Wright, *Creeks and Seminole*, 252.

ensures that we understand Osceola first and foremost as American figure rather than a Seminole one, just as the stories Americans told about Osceola in the nineteenth century had less to do with any real person named Osceola or with Seminoles generally but rather with how Americans thought of themselves. Osceola was a last hope for Indian race sure to vanish under the unnerving expansion of American progress; he was a lover of freedom and despiser of slavery wherever he saw it, boldly staring down the slave-holding South; and he was a barbaric warrior whose presence in Florida had robbed slaveholders of their human property. He was, of course, none of these things and all of them.